

# Battling BONE SPURS

## Causes and consequences of the body's response to wear and tear

BY KAREN FINUCAN CLARKSON

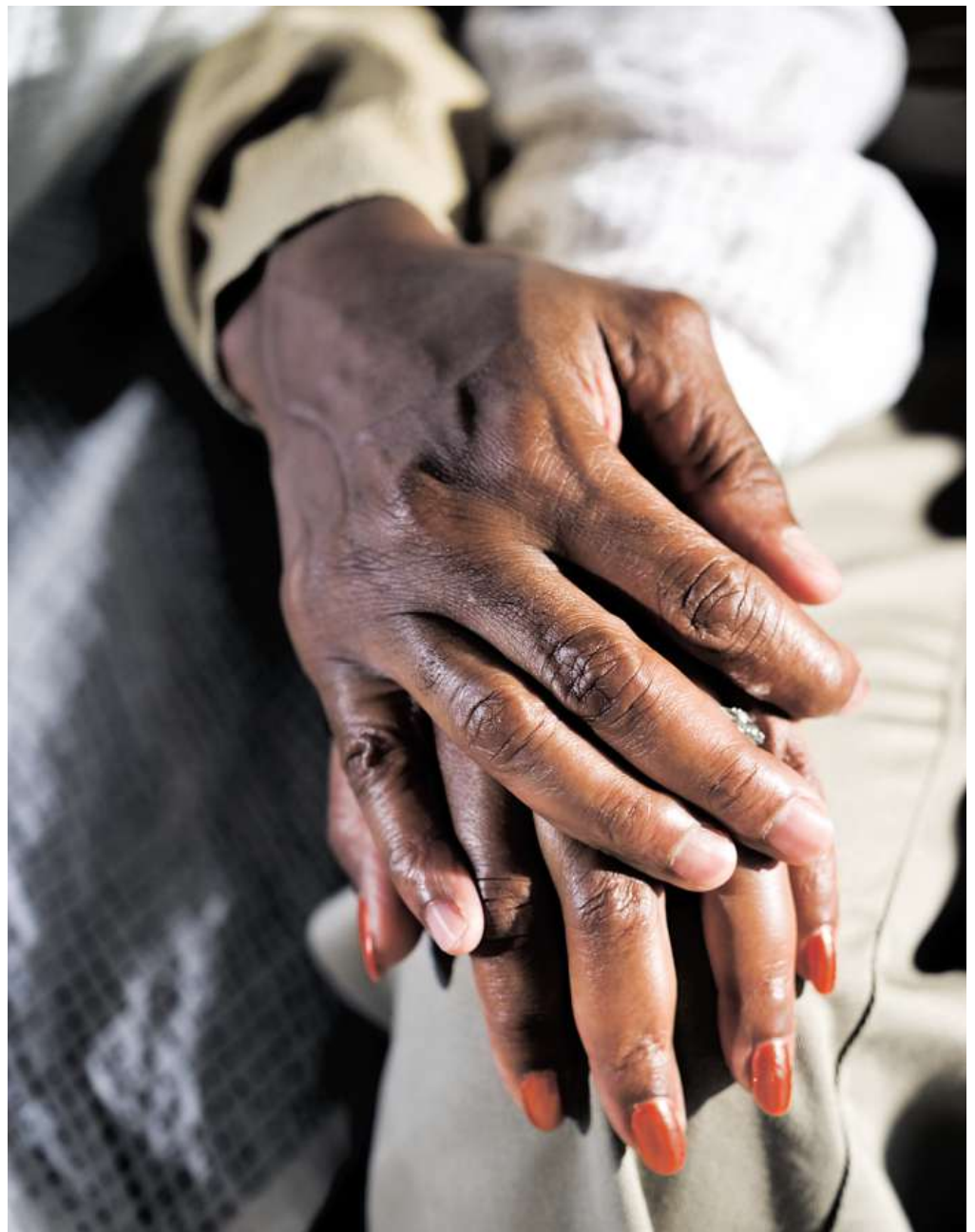
**T**hey are known to be painful and to interfere with the movement of a joint. But bone spurs—common in older adults—often are benign. If you are over 60, chances are good that you have a bone spur, though you may not yet realize it, according to local orthopedic surgeons.

A bone spur—the creation of extra bone—is the result of inflammation, stress, pressure or damage. “It’s the body’s response to wear and tear on the joints,” said Loiy Mustafa, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon at Capital Orthopaedic Specialists, P.A. with privileges at Doctors Community Hospital in Lanham. Bone spurs are found in joints as well as in places where tendons and ligaments attach to bone. In seniors, a bone spur most often occurs when there is degeneration of a joint due to osteoarthritis, Mustafa said.

“What happens is that over time the cartilage breaks down in a joint, and the body deals with that by growing bone in order to provide more stability and surface area,” said Sridhar M. Durbhakula, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon at OrthoBethesda in Bethesda, and co-medical director of the Joint Center at Adventist HealthCare Shady Grove Medical Center.

**OSTEOARTHRITIS MAY ACCOUNT FOR THE GREATEST** number of bone spurs, but there are other factors that contribute to their creation. “Occasionally people get bone spurs from running,” said Anthony S. Unger, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon at Washington Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine in Chevy Chase.

“They also result from pressure, like when a shoe rubs on the side of a foot,” said Unger, who has privileges at Suburban Hospital in Bethesda. Bone spurs have been associated with plantar fasciitis, a condition in which a ligament on the bottom of the foot becomes stressed and inflamed, and Achilles tendonitis, where the tendon in the back of the heel becomes irritated, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons.



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While bone spurs are found throughout the body—in the feet, hips, spine, neck, shoulder and hands—they are most common in the knees, said Durbhakula. The extra bone can make it painful to move the knee and can interfere with a joint's range of motion. "The knee is where bone spurs commonly break off and become loose bodies," he said. As loose bodies float in the knee, they can cause intermittent locking or a sensation that something is preventing the joint from moving properly.

**THE GROWTH OF EXTRA BONE IS AN UNCONTROLLABLE** natural response that can have unintended consequences. In the shoulder, for example, bone spurs can pinch rotator cuff tendons. Pain, stiffness and reduced range of motion can occur, said Mustafa, noting that persistent impingement of rotator cuff tendons can lead to tears, which exacerbate the condition.

In the spine, bone spurs can pinch the spinal cord or its nerve roots. "When a bone spur presses on the nerves, which extend into the body, you can get pain running up and down your arms and legs," said Unger. Weakness or numbness in the extremities also may result.

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An X-ray is most commonly used to diagnose a bone spur, according to Durbhakula. "Because it is bone and calcified, it is readily seen on an X-ray," he said. Treatment may vary by the location of the bone spur, although there are some approaches that are generally applicable.

"We usually start with conservative measures to reduce pain, such as oral anti-inflammatory medications or cortisone injections into the joint," said Mustafa. Physical therapy can increase a joint's range of motion. "When a joint becomes stiff or hard to move, the soft tissue structures around it become tight. Stretching and strengthening exercises can be helpful." Improved functioning of the joint along with a reduction in pain may delay or eliminate the need for surgery, he said.

According to Durbhakula, other nonsurgical treatments include a supplement known as TripleFlex, which contributes to joint comfort, mobility and flexibility, and Synvisc injections, which supplement fluid in the knee and help lubricate and cushion the joint.

"Synvisc gives the knee more 'hydraulic suspension' so that bones are not rubbing against each other as much," he said. Lifestyle changes, including weight loss and stress reduction, also can be beneficial, relieving pressure and tension on joints and muscles.

"When conservative measures are not successful and a patient's quality of life is adversely affected, then surgical intervention may be indicated," said Mustafa. "In the hip and knee, we can do joint replacement surgery. In the spine, we can decompress the pinched nerve. It all depends on the location of the bone spur."

Early diagnosis of a bone spur is critical to prevent additional damage to a joint and maintaining or regaining one's quality of life, the orthopedic surgeons said. "The best treatment takes into account many factors and is the one that the physician and patient come up with together," said Mustafa.

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