

8. New pain as you get older? Here is when to see your healthcare professional (and when not to)!

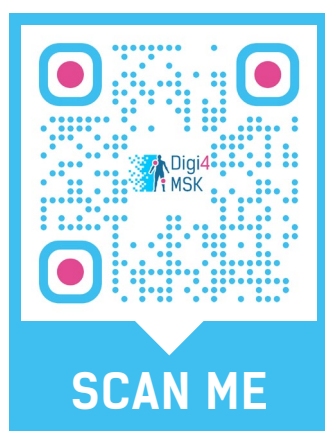
Elvira, 69, had always considered herself healthy. She enjoyed long walks, volunteering at the library, and gardening on weekends. Over the past few years, though, she began to notice small, nagging pains that came and went—one week in her hands, the next in her knees or shoulders. Nothing severe, but enough to make her wonder if something was *'wearing out'*.

At first, she ignored it. Then, after reading online that “joint pain after sixty means degeneration,” she grew uneasy. The idea that her body was slowly breaking down made her anxious. She started avoiding certain chores, gave up carrying groceries, and even reduced her walks *'to protect her joints'*.

Her general practitioner listened to her story and performed a check-up. Everything looked normal for her age—no swelling, no inflammation, no alarming signs. *“Your body has lived a lot”* the doctor said kindly, *“but you’re still strong”*. Elvira nodded, though she was not sure what to make of it. If nothing was seriously wrong, why did her body ache more than before?

At home that evening, she reflected: the pains were not constant, they did not stop her from sleeping, and they often faded when she stayed active. Maybe her body was simply changing—not breaking. Still, she wanted to know how to tell the difference between natural age-related discomfort and something that truly needed attention.

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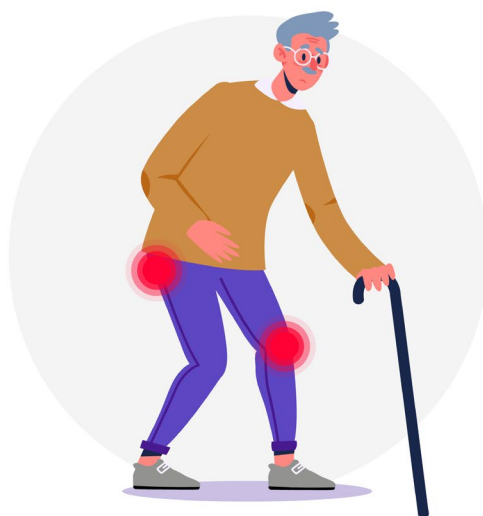
Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding the difference between normal age-related aches and signs that require medical assessment.
- Recognizing how mild, shifting pain patterns often reflect sensitivity or stiffness rather than disease.
- Learning when to monitor symptoms and when it is time to consult a healthcare professional.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/mQG2Ku7uo84>

8.1. Does every new ache really mean you need a visit to a healthcare professional?

1. **Your body shows “wear and tear”—it is normal!** The term “wear and tear” has frequently been used as a stand in for normal age-related changes. Just like our skin gets wrinkles, our bodies also show signs of aging inside. X-rays and MRIs often show wear and tear like arthritis or disc changes as we get older. Many people with these changes feel absolutely no pain! So, a new ache does not automatically mean something is “broken” or needs immediate fixing. It is often just your body adapting.
2. **Pain is complex, not just damage:** Pain is not just about what is happening in your joints or muscles. It can be influenced by many things: your stress levels, how well you sleep, your mood, and how much you move. These factors often play a bigger role in your pain than a specific “problem” that a test might find.
3. **Preventing unnecessary tests and worries:** If every ache led to a healthcare professional’s visit and tests, we would all be living in hospitals! For common mild aches that are not severe or accompanied by worrying signs, too many tests can cause unnecessary worry, expose you to unnecessary treatments, and cost money without actually changing the best way to help you feel better.
4. **You have the power over your pain:** Many common aches and pains, even as you get older, respond incredibly well to things you can do yourself. This includes gentle movement, specific exercises, pacing your activities, and managing stress. These active steps are often the most powerful tools for long-term comfort and for keeping you active.



8.2. When should you see a healthcare professional?

While not every ache means a trip to the healthcare professional, there are definitely times when you should seek medical advice. It is important to look out for the following symptoms:

1. **Sudden, severe pain** that came on for no clear reason.
2. Pain that does not get better with rest or mild activity, or pain that **gets worse very quickly**.
3. Pain after a **significant fall or injury**.
4. Pain that wakes you up at night, or **increases gradually over days or weeks**.
5. Pain accompanied by other worrying symptoms like **unexplained weight loss, fever, chills, gradually increasing weakness, numbness, or tingling** in your arms or legs, or problems with bladder or bowel control.
6. If your pain **limits your daily activities** and does not improve with your usual self-care strategies in approximately 3 months.
7. If you have a **history of cancer or other serious health conditions** that might make certain pains more concerning.
8. If you have a generalised feeling of malaise or feeling notably unwell.

Takeaway messages:

Do not ignore new pain, but also do not panic. Your body is resilient. For common aches, focusing on movement and self-management is often best. For worrying symptoms or pain that significantly impacts your life, your healthcare professional is your best partner in understanding it and finding the right path forward for your health and well-being.