Osteoarthritis of the Knee

**Narrative Section**

**HISTORICAL VIGNETTE** - The presence of osteoarthritis (OA) of the knee joint dates back thousands of years. Ancient descriptions in Egyptian manuscripts provide clinical evidence of osteoarthritis. Modern evaluations of pre-historic skeletons from Alaskan hunter-gatherers (from 4000 BCE) show degenerative changes of the knee joint. Even the derivation of the word “osteoarthritis” comes from early Greek physicians, a term they used to suggest inflammatory changes of the joint. But recent understanding of this nearly ubiquitous condition questions certain features. Most OA of the knee does not involve active inflammation. More than joint pressure and overuse causes the clinical wear of the joint. And an increasing prevalence of this condition in a sedentary society suggests additional causes. So how can modern clinicians use their physical exam to increase the likelihood that the knee being examined is afflicted by osteoarthritis?

**CONTEXT AND USEFULNESS** - By understanding six cardinal features of the history and physical exam of the knee, clinicians can distinguish osteoarthritis of the knee from other types of joint inflammatory conditions.

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