



**Figure 3-2.** Visual representations of arthritis.

problem will often result in a decrease of symptoms, so medication management is an important consideration.

## Arthritis

The word arthritis can be defined by its syllables: *arthro* refers to a joint, and *itis* refers to inflammation (Figure 3-2). Therefore, arthritis is an inflammation of a joint or joints (CDC, 2014a). When multiple joints are affected by arthritis, it is referred to as *polyarthritis*—many (*poly*) inflamed joints. Arthritis is divided into two distinct types: *osteoarthritis* (OA) and *rheumatoid arthritis* (RA). OA is also known as *degenerative joint disease* and is associated with the aging process. By age 65 years, 49.7% of people are diagnosed with OA. It is most prevalent in the weightbearing joints of the legs and hips, ankles, and low back. OA is also diagnosed in the neck or cervical area of the spine. Generally, OA is accompanied with outward visible signs of joint changes.

RA is an autoimmune disease in which the body attacks itself, most commonly in the synovium (or synovial fluid area) of the joints. It is accompanied by physical symptoms of fatigue, a general feeling of not being well (malaise), a persistent aching of the joints, and visible joint changes. Frequently, the occupational therapist is called on to fabricate splints for hands and wrists and to educate the client in correct performance of daily activities to avoid excessive stress on the joint. Also included in this intervention is education and training in correct body mechanics, work simplification, and joint protection (Box 3-5).