Arthritis: The Nation’s Joint Problem

www.arthritisresearchuk.org/jointproblem
Arthritis is one of the biggest public health issues facing the UK, yet it is not talked about. Over 10 million people of all ages in the UK are living with arthritis. Six out of ten (57%) of those people say that they are in pain every single day, while eight in ten (78%) are in pain most days.

For people who have arthritis, getting through the day is difficult. The vast majority of people with arthritis (88%) describe it as a debilitating and life-restricting condition. Imagine finding it painful to get out of bed, dress yourself or use public transport. Imagine if you had a condition which affected your ability to do your job, socialise with friends or play with your own children or grandchildren. That is the reality of living arthritis. And, sadly, this in turn can lead to loneliness, depression and financial difficulty.

Arthritis also has a significant impact on wider society. It hurts our economy, as the condition is one of the leading causes of sick days in the UK, accounting for 25.1 million working days lost per year. Further, one in five (20%) people consult their GP about a musculoskeletal problem every year, at a time when doctors’ resources are under increasing pressure.

Whether directly or indirectly, arthritis affects every single one of us. Yet the significant and often devastating impact of arthritis is not matched by societal awareness, understanding or investment. Indeed, almost four out of five (77%) people with arthritis don’t think that society understands what it’s like to live with the condition. It is all too often passed off as being an inevitable and even an acceptable part of getting older. This perception completely underestimates the condition and means that people with arthritis do not get the support and help they need to live well.

Arthritis Research UK is committed to raising awareness of the true impact of the condition. If society better understands the reality of arthritis, we believe that the needs of people living with the condition will start to be addressed – be that in the workplace, the GP surgery, public spaces or even in their home.

To this end, we have written the Nation’s Joint Problem report. Here we bring together stark facts, new research and real-life stories to challenge long held misconceptions about what arthritis is and the impact it has. It is only by highlighting the true impact of arthritis that we, as a nation, can start to work together to realise and address this joint problem.

You’re not supposed to be diagnosed with arthritis in your late thirties. At least that was what I always imagined. In fact, I doubt I’d given the condition much thought at all until the inflammation and discomfort I was developing in my hands were given a name. A name that I associated with – yes, you guessed it – aches and pains suffered only by old people. It came as something of a surprise.

My form of arthritis is psoriatic, directly linked to the skin condition psoriasis which I’ve had since my teenage years. Arthritis occurs later in roughly one in five people with psoriasis. At its worst, arthritis has caused me sleepless nights, it’s interrupted leisure activities like sport and music, and it’s got in the way of some of the most mundane daily tasks you can imagine (tying shoelaces, combing hair, cleaning teeth). I’ve never had to take time off work, but for several years – before I went on to a much more effective drug treatment – it made my life much more difficult.

For people less fortunate than me, it’s much more than that. In recent years, I’ve been quite public about my own condition and have met many people for whose lives has been completely transformed by the difficulties arthritis has caused them – whether it’s colleagues, family members or strangers in the street – often makes matters worse. That’s why raising awareness is so important.

The more people realise how common arthritis is, how it affects people of all ages, the impact it has on us all, and how employable people with the condition continue to be even if they need a few minor adaptations around the workplace, the more appropriate the level of support the condition receives will be.

I guarantee you’ll know someone with arthritis. The more you understand about the condition, the better we can help people feel.
The condition damages our economy, through lost working days and the resulting loss of productivity and revenue. This year alone two of the most common forms of arthritis - osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis - will cost our economy £2.58 billion.7

Arthritis also has a significant impact on the NHS. The cost of treatment for osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis this year is estimated at £10.2 billion. But the impact doesn’t end there. Society is being deprived of the contribution that people with arthritis could make. We are missing out on millions of people’s talent and their companionship. Arthritis affects everyone. Despite this, the condition remains invisible.

Decisions are made, every day, which don’t take arthritis into account. Some local authorities fail to make adequate resources available for people with arthritis when planning for public health needs. Employers don’t make simple changes that would make the working day easier for people with the condition. And because individuals don’t feel able to discuss their arthritis, they don’t end up asking for the help they need.

Until the issue of arthritis is clearly recognised as a problem by society, we can’t get closer to finding solutions.

This report shows the true impact arthritis is having on our nation – on our economy, on the NHS, on families and social lives, and on those who live with the condition every day. Arthritis Research UK is determined to solve the problem of arthritis, by bringing together the right people and starting a nationwide conversation.

We need to move arthritis up the national agenda, so it’s considered when critical decisions are made; decisions that have a profound effect on the lives of people living with the condition.
About arthritis

‘Arthritis’ is an umbrella term which is used to describe painful conditions that affect the bones, muscles and joints in all parts of the body. It can also be referred to as musculoskeletal conditions.

There are over 200 different types of arthritis, with osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis being two of the most common forms. Common symptoms of all types of arthritis include pain, stiffness and a loss of mobility and dexterity, and every type can interfere with people’s ability to carry out their normal daily activity.

Three groups of musculoskeletal conditions

Broadly, there are three groups of musculoskeletal conditions: inflammatory conditions, conditions of musculoskeletal pain, and osteoporosis and fragility fractures. Figure two explores each of these groups in more detail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>1: Inflammatory conditions</th>
<th>2: Conditions of musculoskeletal pain</th>
<th>3: Osteoporosis and fragility fractures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Rheumatoid arthritis.</td>
<td>Osteoarthritis, back pain.</td>
<td>Fracture after a fall from a standing height.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>Any.</td>
<td>More common with rising age.</td>
<td>Mainly affects older people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression</td>
<td>Often rapid onset.</td>
<td>Gradual onset.</td>
<td>Osteoporosis is a gradual weakening of bone. Fragility fractures are sudden discrete events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevalence</td>
<td>Common (e.g. around 400,000 adults in the UK have rheumatoid arthritis).</td>
<td>Very common (e.g. 8.75 million people in the UK have sought treatment for osteoarthritis).</td>
<td>Common (e.g. around 89,000 hip fragility fractures occur each year in the UK).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms</td>
<td>Common musculoskeletal symptoms include pain, joint stiffness and limitation of movement. Symptoms often fluctuate in severity over time.</td>
<td>Osteoporosis itself is painless. Fragility fractures are painful and disabling.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent of disease</td>
<td>Can affect any part of the body including skin, eyes and internal organs.</td>
<td>Affects the joints, spine and pain system.</td>
<td>Hip, wrist and spinal bones are the most common sites of fractures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Osteoporosis is a condition of bone weakening which in itself is painless. Fragility fractures caused by osteoporosis happen when frail bones break, causing pain and disability. Bone fractures can also occur due to trauma or injury.
Arthritis: The Nation’s Joint Problem

**The Scale of the Problem**
- **10 million** affected in the UK
  - There are over 10 million adults affected by arthritis in the UK today
  - One-in-six people currently have osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis – two of the most common forms of arthritis – and this is predicted to rise to **one-in-five by 2050**

**Arthritis Related Conditions are the #1 Cause of Disability in the UK**
- 88% describe it as a debilitating and life-limiting condition

**Yet People Don’t Take it Seriously**
- 77% of those who have arthritis say society doesn’t understand what it’s like to live with the condition
- 58% of population don’t see arthritis as a major health condition or have never thought about it before

**The UK Economy is Losing Out**
- **£2.58bn** cost to the UK economy
  - For two of the largest conditions – osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis – 25.1m working days will be lost in 2017 at a cost of £2.58bn to the UK economy
  - And for these two conditions alone, the cost of lost working days is set to rise to **£3.43bn by 2030**

**The NHS is Losing Out**
- **£10.2bn** cost to the NHS this year
  - Treating the two most common forms of arthritis – osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis – will cost the NHS and wider healthcare system £10.2bn this year. Cumulatively, the healthcare cost will reach **£118.6bn over the next decade**

**Individuals are Losing Out**
- **78% Experience Pain Most Days**
  - This leads to significant difficulty performing the everyday tasks that we take for granted. The result is a loss of independence, feelings of shame and embarrassment, and a growing sense of hopelessness

**Families are Losing Out**
- 76% are not able to join family walks, play with their children/grandchildren or keeping in touch with friends, due to their arthritis
- 53% of people with arthritis think they are a nuisance to loved ones, rising to **81%** among those with the most severe forms of arthritis
- 29% feel unable to attend social arrangements with friends
- 58% feel unable to take part in their favourite hobbies such as gardening or playing sports

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Stats from: York Health Economics Consortium 2017, ESRO, 2016 and Norstat August 2017

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Arthritis is one of the biggest public health issues facing the UK, yet it is not talked about. We are revealing the true impact arthritis is having on society because, directly or indirectly, arthritis affects everyone.

Liam O’Toole, CEO Arthritis Research UK
People with arthritis are losing out

Arthritis doesn’t just cause pain and fatigue; it affects all aspects of daily life.

Standing for long periods is a challenge for two in five people (41%) as is carrying heavy objects. Going up and downstairs, or simply walking, is hard for nearly one in four (24% and 23% respectively).9 A widespread lack of understanding of the condition magnifies the challenges people face each day.

“I wear a belt of pain every day.” – Sam, 49

The scale of the problem

One in six people has arthritis.10 Even if they don’t have it themselves, everyone knows someone with the condition; a relative, friend, neighbour or colleague. The chances are that their quality of life is diminished. Arthritis can cut them off from fully participating in life. Not only are they living with physical and psychological pain, but the world around them doesn’t understand what they’re going through.

“I feel like I’m invisible, no-one notices me.” – Sam, 49

The impact on everyday life

On top of dealing with daily pain, almost two thirds (62%) of people with arthritis experience significant difficulty with everyday activities the rest of the population take for granted.11 This includes everything from getting out of bed and dressing, to leaving the house. It can be hard to pursue hobbies and interests too, as 58% of people report. Gardening is mentioned by 28% and 34% cite sport and exercise.12

“If I can get out and go to the shops, that’s a good day. And I might find the next day I’m exhausted.” – Sean, 36

The impact on mental health

The pain of arthritis makes people living with the condition more prone to mental health problems, from anxiety to sleep disorders.13 A quarter of people (25%) say they feel low because of their arthritis.14 Many people are embarrassed about the effects of the condition and perceptions that it’s an ‘old people’s disease’. A significant number (35%) feel arthritis has a negative effect on their appearance.15 This is particularly common among women, who also worry that it causes weight gain and affects their ability to move naturally.16

Common myths about arthritis

- “It’s only aches and pains.” 25% say arthritis is inconvenient but not life changing
- Always visible 2 in 5 (44%) say they think arthritis is always visible19

We’re losing valuable people from society

Many people with arthritis are missing out on participating in community life, as they feel frail and fearful of going out unaccompanied.20 This is compounded by the fact that public spaces aren’t arthritis-friendly, as 60% of people with the condition confirm – an issue which affects everything from meeting friends and going shopping to pursuing an interest.21 Two thirds (65%) of people with arthritis have long-term fears about how they’ll cope, saying they are scared about the future.22

Support for people with arthritis

If you have arthritis and need support visit arthritisresearchuk.org to find out more about what we do and how we can help you.

Case Study: Kirran Gill

It’s very hard for people to understand what it’s like living in constant pain. Even my friends and family don’t always understand.

Sometimes it feels that my life is so removed from normal that it can be hard to imagine. I went to my cousin’s wedding recently and I had to ask beforehand whether there was somewhere I could have a lie down in the middle. I needed to think about if I needed to take cushions or my hot water bottle to the venue, and which of my back-up medication and seat in the disabled section, there’s no guarantee we’ll be able to go as the pain could worsen at any moment. I try and go out with friends when I can but it’s frustrating for them as I often have to cancel at the last minute as I’m in too much pain and can’t leave the house. I’ve lost quite a few friends because of my condition.

“I’ve lost quite a few friends because of my condition.”
Every year, many millions of working days are lost to arthritis – making it one of the UK’s single biggest cause of sick leave.21 Osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis alone, two of the most common forms of the disease, account for 25.1 million of those days – costing our economy approximately £2.58 billion in lost revenue.24 As the population ages, the number of days missed due to rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis combined is set to rise to 25.9 million by 2030, and 27.2 million days by 2050, costing £3.43 billion and £4.74 billion respectively.25

We are losing valuable talent from our workforce
Not only is arthritis a leading cause of illness-related absence, it also results in a quarter (25%) of people with the condition leaving work, or retiring, earlier than they would otherwise.26 This means many people with arthritis struggle financially, as 44% of those with chronic pain from their arthritis and 17% of those with milder pain report.27 Just 11% say they are currently accessing help that is helping them to stay in work for longer.28

Arthritis affects all kinds of jobs
Although arthritis is particularly prevalent in sectors where the work is physically demanding (see box), almost every type of work is made more difficult for people with arthritis. Whether it’s a job that means spending long hours on your feet – such as a nurse or a chef – or a desk job, where you spend much of the day typing and/or in a sedentary position, employees with arthritis feel the effects of their condition during the working week.

The invisible problem in the workplace
Despite the enormous cost to them, employers and colleagues aren’t aware of the problem arthritis poses at work. Because the condition is hidden, arthritis is not something that is spoken about or even thought about. 44% of the general population say they aren’t aware that arthritis is a major cause of days lost to sickness and 37% say they don’t think they know anyone with arthritis.23 Consequently, employers often aren’t aware that they need to make adjustments, or what the adjustments are, that could help employees with arthritis stay in work for longer – such as allowing staff opportunities to work from home or commute outside rush hour, to make their journey more manageable.

Case Study: Catherine Manning
I was diagnosed with juvenile arthritis when I was 12. It wasn’t until five years ago that things really started to deteriorate. In the space of a year I was on crutches full time. X-rays revealed that I needed knee replacements.

Work became a daily struggle. Having arthritis means lots of doctors’ appointments. I quickly used up all my permitted sick days and holiday allowance on hospital visits and eventually I had to go on long-term sick leave. My employer did everything that was required from a legal perspective, but they weren’t able to offer any flexibility where I needed it. I wasn’t able to work from home or change my work hours. It wasn’t safe for me to take the tube during rush hour, so I would have to take taxis. This meant my daily commute could be as long as five hours. At the end of the journey, my husband would have to lift me out of the car. When the firm moved to a new office without disabled access or a disabled toilet, I would have to use the nearest Starbucks or Costa when I needed the bathroom. There were occasions when I didn’t make it on time, which was just humiliating. They would also dispute the advice given by my specialists and argue that my condition was curable. When they told me I was going to be medically discharged, I felt I had lost the will to fight. Without work, I feel some of my purpose has been taken away.

“Our without work, I feel some of my purpose has been taken away.”

– Donna Roberts, 40
The impact of arthritis on the health service

Arthritis accounts for a huge proportion of our health service’s time and budget, at a time when its resources are already under considerable pressure.

Care for people with osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis cost the NHS £10.2 billion in 2017.14

One in five people consult their GP about a musculoskeletal condition every year and those appointments account for thousands of hours of doctors’ time.31

Managing chronic pain – such as that caused by osteoarthritis – takes up a huge amount of health professionals’ time. It’s estimated to account for 4.6 million appointments each year – equating to full-time employment for 793 GPs.33

‘People with a musculoskeletal condition’ make up the largest group of people treated by physiotherapists; there were 1.9 million first appointments and 4.8 million follow-up appointments for people with a musculoskeletal condition in 2010/11.34

Arthritis also has an impact on surgery time too. In 2015, more than 98,211 hip replacements and 104,695 knee replacements were carried out.35

The impact of arthritis not being a priority

NHS resources are stretched, or even non-existent, in places where they are needed most. This is because at present, the true impact of arthritis on our health service is not recognised.

Often, decisions about health aren’t made with arthritis in mind. One in four (26%) local authorities haven’t included the needs of people with arthritis in their assessment of local health needs.16 What’s more, the majority (64%) of local authorities fail to take osteoarthritis into account in their strategy for meeting those needs.17 In many cases this means it’s harder for people with arthritis to access the support services they need to be able to better manage their condition – like physiotherapy and occupational health.

GPs and other healthcare professionals providing frontline services could receive more support and training to be able to improve their diagnosis of arthritis and support people to manage their condition more effectively.

From a prevention point of view, we would like to see Public Health England recognise arthritis as a public health priority. It’s important that the public have access to information about what it means to take care of their musculoskeletal health. And hopefully future cases of arthritis could be prevented.

Case Study: Phil Davies

I’m a bit of a medical anomaly as my arthritis started in my shoulders rather than the smaller joints. At first, I was told the pain was down to a pulled muscle or strained tendon. This lasted for nine months before I was sent for further tests.

My oldest son was only a few weeks old at the time and I couldn’t pick him up or feed him.

I have to go into hospital on average seven times every three months, although this can fluctuate from time to time. The rheumatology nurses are my saviour as I can contact them at any time and they understand my condition and background really well. I recently needed to change my medication slightly as it was having quite negative side effects. The nurses contacted my GP the same day to update my prescription. In the winter, I am more liable to catch infections and illnesses because my immune system is reduced. I once spent a week in A&E because of the flu. When I ring the doctor for an appointment, often the receptionist doesn’t understand why I need an appointment so badly. It can be difficult to explain why I need to see a GP before I’m ill.

“My oldest son was only a few weeks old at the time and I couldn’t pick him up or feed him.”

The NHS is losing out to arthritis

Arthritis is having a severe effect on the NHS. The condition affects millions of people and this number is growing. But six in ten people with arthritis believe that the condition still isn’t a priority for the NHS.
It’s not just the 10 million people in the UK with arthritis who feel the effects of the disease; it also impacts upon the lives of all those who are close to them. And, as the number of people with osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis alone is set to rise to one in five by 2050, its impact is going to be even more far-reaching.

The invisible condition nobody talks about
Overwhelmingly, people with arthritis feel the condition is invisible and don’t talk about it. Arthritis is a hidden topic that gets swept under the carpet, even by those closest to people with the disease. The majority (86%) of people with arthritis try hard not to let the condition define them.

The majority (86%) of people with arthritis try hard not to let the condition define them. Some worry they won’t be taken seriously either because the condition is misunderstood, or they are afraid of being seen as a nuisance. It can be difficult to talk and be open about arthritis with family and friends.

The cost to relationships
Three quarters (76%) of people with arthritis say their family and social lives are compromised because of their condition, and a third (29%) admit that they feel lonely.

The ways in which arthritis interferes with family life is something people find particularly difficult. People report having to say no to grandchildren who want to play, having to stay at home while the rest of the family goes on a walk, or losing touch with friends because it’s hard to meet up. Almost a third (28%) of people report a negative effect on physical intimacy with their partners.

The difficulties of feeling dependent
Many people with arthritis find that coping with everyday life independently is a challenge, and many rely on loved ones to take on the role of carer.

A third (32%) say they feel too reliant on those around them to get everyday things done, and this feeling of overreliance on others can be a cause of tension. Five out of ten (53%) people with arthritis believe they’re a nuisance to their family – and with the more severe forms of the condition, this rises to eight out of ten (81%).

Finances can cause stress too. Those with working partners often feel they’re a burden, while others are concerned that their condition depletes the household budget.

When friends and colleagues can’t physically see anything wrong with you, they assume you’re OK and often I let people think that, rather than be honest about my arthritis. What people won’t see is the impact that one day out will have on the rest of the week. I will have to rest for two days beforehand, so I don’t tire myself out before I go. Then I’ll dose up on painkillers to manage the pain while we are out. It’s likely I’ll spend the next two days in bed just to recover. I’ll let people see the nice day out with friends, but behind the scenes there are real consequences. This hidden impact is why it’s so important to change attitudes and help people understand more about arthritis. If that understanding was there, perhaps I wouldn’t feel as ashamed and would be more honest.

“When friends and colleagues can’t physically see anything wrong with you, they assume you’re OK and often I let people think that”
We will only be able to solve our joint problem when arthritis is properly recognised and understood. There is no magic-bullet solution, and action is needed on many levels, across all areas of society - from policy-makers and healthcare providers, charities, designers of public spaces, the media, to people with arthritis themselves and their family and friends.

But we believe this is possible, and our campaign to raise awareness is an important first step on our journey.

Individuals
We know how difficult life is for people with arthritis, and for many they don’t know where to start with this challenge.

People with arthritis can make a difference by sharing the messages in this report and of our Nation’s Joint Problem campaign, so more people understand the true impact of the condition.

The economy
We want to help people with arthritis to remain in work for longer. This can only happen when everyone - from government and business bodies to employers and employees - understand the condition and its effects.

As a society, we need to be more aware of the challenges arthritis brings.

Increased understanding will lead to employers and employees being more conscious of the simple changes that could make it easier for more people with arthritis to remain in work.

The NHS
By recognising the huge challenge which arthritis brings to the NHS, we can start to talk about how we are better able to support health professionals in treating the condition.

For example, we need conversations about how there can be better training for GPs and other health professionals who are providing frontline services. This would lead to quicker diagnoses, and better support services to help people with arthritis to manage their condition more effectively.

There should be better provision of treatments and services so that people with arthritis can access the support they need to manage and maintain their health.

Family life
We want to help family and friends understand the impact of arthritis, so they can better support and understand individuals who have the condition.

Everyone can make a difference by finding out the facts and sharing the messages in this report, so more people understand the true impact of arthritis.

If you are living with arthritis or know someone with arthritis, please visit our website for support www.arthritisresearchuk.org

We have an unrelenting drive and commitment to create a world free from the impact of arthritis.

To achieve our goal, we are bringing the right people together to tackle the problem. We are listening to people with arthritis and ensuring that their needs are being heard by the people with the power to make change. We are talking to politicians, doctors, designers and employers so that the NHS, public services, public spaces and workplaces better support people with arthritis.

We are funding researchers up and down the country to develop breakthrough treatments and, ultimately, find a cure. We are using our research to provide trusted information and advice to people with arthritis and their loved ones – so they feel supported to live well with arthritis.

Finally, and critically, we are raising awareness of the issue and revealing the true impact of arthritis on the individual and society, so that we as a nation can start to collectively realise and address this shared problem.

For more information about living with the condition and support, go to our website www.arthritisresearchuk.org

To find out more about the campaign and to share, go to www.arthritisresearchuk.org/jointproblem
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