

Health research and you

Arthritis

The disease

Arthritis, often referred to as a single disease, is an umbrella term for more than 100 medical conditions. Arthritis is marked by inflammation of the joints, causing pain, stiffness, deformity and disability. Osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout account for more than 95% of cases in Australia.

There are 3.85 million Australians living with arthritis*. Nearly 1 in 5 Australians has arthritis and the risk of contracting arthritis increases with age to nearly 1 in 2 by the age of 55*. The federal government recognised arthritis is a serious health issue by making it a National Health Priority in 2002. It is the most prevalent of all National Health Priorities. You are more likely to contract arthritis than heart disease, cancer, asthma, diabetes or mental illness and it is the single biggest cause of disability in Australia#. In addition, nearly half of all Australians living with cancer, diabetes and heart disease are also living with arthritis#.

Why Invest

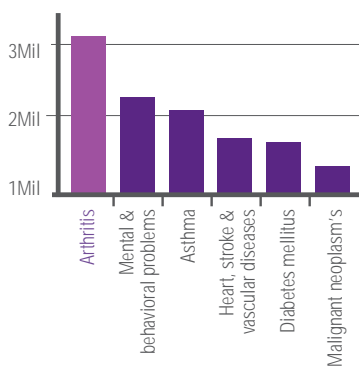
The total cost of arthritis to the Australian economy was estimated to be \$23.9 billion by Access Economics in 2007*. The average cost of arthritis per person per year is \$6200; 61% of arthritis costs are borne by the individuals themselves.

The outlook for people living with arthritis has improved beyond recognition from the days when people were told to just rest or that nothing could be done. Major advances in the treatment and prevention of arthritis have transformed people's lives. Breakthroughs in research have led to the development of effective medications and joint replacements. Early and successful treatment gives those affected a fair chance to enjoy a meaningful life that may include living independently, remaining in the workforce, and reducing demands on the health system.

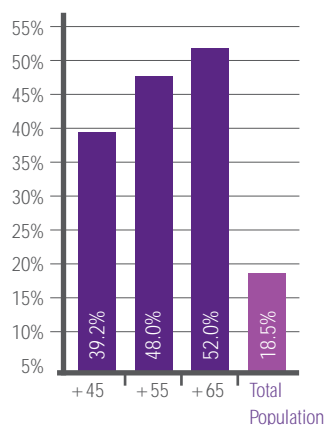
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Arthritis is not yet curable but with early and proper diagnosis as well as a customised management plan, it can be controlled. While the condition is usually manageable, it invariably impacts on a person's quality of life and includes varying degrees of discomfort, pain and disability. There is a widely held belief that arthritis is simply a consequence of age, but it is not a natural part of ageing. In fact 2.4 million of all people living with the disease are of working age. Research suggests that early intervention can delay the onset of the disease and may reduce the number of cases of osteoarthritis by about 500,000 within 15 years. By managing your condition you can improve your quality of life, gain a feeling of control and reduce pain.

Prevalence Comparisons
Arthritis & Selected Conditions



Percent of all people living with arthritis



Who benefits

Claire is 40 years old and an experienced paralegal. Twelve years ago she developed severe psoriatic arthritis that over time affected multiple joints including her hands, a knee and an ankle. The pain and swelling were so severe that she eventually had to give up her job. She was barely able to look after herself and struggled to care for her two children. Claire and her family had to move in with her mother in order to try to cope. The disease was relentless. None of the then available therapies were successful for her and she became angry and depressed. Finally, she was able to access one of the newer biological drugs. This enabled Claire to do many everyday tasks that we take for granted. "I brushed my daughter's hair for the first time in her life today," Claire told her rheumatologist. Claire is now fully functional, has moved back into her own home and manages without any outside assistance.

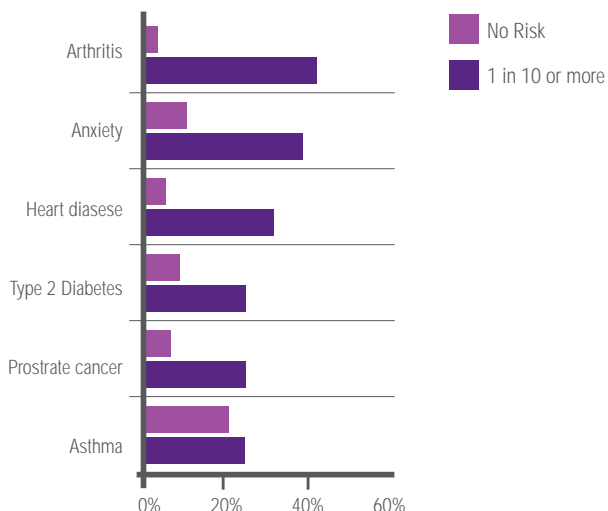


Your Say

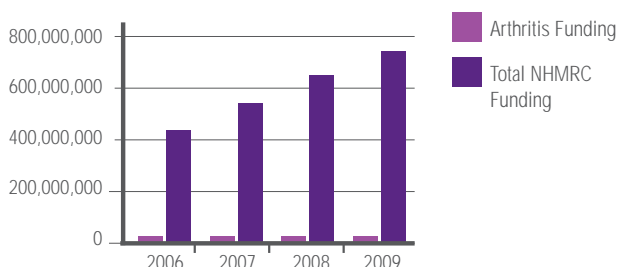
Research Australia's Public Opinion Poll (2008) conducted by Crosby Textor showed that Australians are more worried about developing arthritis than any other disease. Arthritis is seen as a very significant risk, with 43% of Australians rating their lifetime risk as 1 in 10 or more and only 2% seeing themselves as having no risk.

Question: Please indicate what you believe (or you would guess) the chances are of you personally contracting the following medical conditions in your lifetime.

Research Australia Poll 2008



NHMRC Arthritis Research Funding (\$)



Source: NHMRC funding into research issues for arthritic and rheumatic conditions 2006 to 2009

Investment in arthritis research

The Australian Government's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funds research into arthritis. Investment into arthritis research increased to \$22 million in 2009 but its share of total NHMRC funding, now just 3.1 per cent, has declined in recent years. Arthritis receives less funding than other National Health Priorities such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes or mental illness.

Funding also comes from private and philanthropic sources. Arthritis Australia supports all areas of research relevant to arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions. Arthritis Australia also supports and fosters the career development of scientists and clinical investigators committed to research into arthritis by offering scholarships and fellowships.

How Australian research makes a difference

Treatment for rheumatoid arthritis has improved markedly as understanding of the disease process improves. With early aggressive therapy using the new designer agents, remission can be achieved in over 50% of patients. Similar comments apply to ankylosing spondylitis and psoriatic arthritis. Australian research has contributed to this success rate by carrying out clinical trials and local development of toll like inhibitors.

Less is known about osteoarthritis (the most common arthritis) but recent Australian research has suggested joint damage may actually be reversible with weight loss in midlife and correction of vitamin D deficiency.

Source: ABS National Health Survey 2004-05

* Source: Painful Realities - Access Economics 2007

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