

**ACREU**



Arthritis Community Research & Evaluation Unit



## Summary of Special Report: **The Burden of Osteoarthritis in Canada**

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common type of arthritis and affects more Canadians than all other forms of arthritis combined. OA is characterized by stiffness, swelling and/or pain of the joints that leads to disability, poorer physical and mental health, and an overall reduced quality of life.

To help communicate the underappreciated impact of OA on Canadians of all ages, the Arthritis Society recently commissioned a special report entitled *The Burden of Osteoarthritis in Canada* (2021) by the Arthritis Community Research and Evaluation Unit (ACREU). This national report is the first of its kind and pulls together data from multiple representative Canadian population-based surveys to provide information about the current state of OA in Canada and the impact faced by people with OA.

A summary of the report's findings is presented here. The full report is available upon request by contacting [mission@arthritis.ca](mailto:mission@arthritis.ca).

## How common is OA?

- ▼ About 15% of Canadians age 20+ have OA.
- ▼ More than 4 million Canadians, or about 1 in every 7 adults, have OA.

## Who has OA?

- ▼ OA is not an “old person’s disease”.
  - While the prevalence of OA rises with age, more than half (52%) of Canadians who have OA are younger than 65.
  - The average age at which Canadian adults with OA report being diagnosed with the disease is 50, but symptoms may have started even earlier.
  - In fact, nearly one third of people with OA report being diagnosed before the age of 45.
- ▼ OA is more common in women than men.
  - 18% of Canadian women age 20+ have OA.
  - 11% of Canadian men age 20+ have OA.

## What is the impact of OA on adults of all ages?

- ▼ The majority of people with OA report that it impacts their lives in some way. About 24% indicate that OA impacts them “quite a bit” or “extremely”.
- ▼ People with OA experience pain, disability and other life-changing problems — regardless of age.
  - More than 90% of people with OA experience joint pain, stiffness or aching. The proportion of people reporting severe and frequent joint pain varies little across age groups.
  - OA pain usually affects more than one joint, regardless of age. The most common symptomatic joint site reported is the knee followed by the hand, back and hip.
  - Nearly two thirds (64%) of people with OA report it limits them in getting a good night’s sleep, especially in women. Women are also more likely to report severe and frequent fatigue.
  - More than three quarters (77%) of people with OA report it has required them to reduce at least some of their day-to-day activities.
  - Nearly half (42%) of the working-age population with OA (i.e., 20-64 years old) reports not being in the labour force or in school, compared to less than one fifth (19%) of the general population. OA may require people to change the number of hours they work, the type of work, the way they carry out tasks, or to stop working altogether.
- ▼ People with OA are more than twice as likely to say their general health isn’t good, compared to the general population. More than two thirds (70%) of people with OA report having at least one other chronic condition, compared to 40% among the general population.
- ▼ People with OA are also more likely to say their mental health isn’t good, compared to the general population. They are more likely to have been diagnosed with a mood or anxiety disorder in addition to OA.

## How are young adults particularly impacted by OA?

- ▼ The impact of OA among younger adults (i.e., under 45) is similar to, if not worse than, the impact among older adults (i.e., 75+).
  - About one third (33%) of younger adults with OA report that it impacts their lives “quite a bit” or “extremely” — similar to those with OA age 75+.
  - Nearly one third (31%) of younger adults with OA have severe and frequent joint pain — similar to those with OA age 75+.
  - Younger adults with OA are more likely to report having trouble getting a good night’s sleep and having severe and frequent fatigue compared to older adults with OA, especially in women.
  - The greatest differences in the proportion of adults who say their general or mental health isn’t good in those with OA compared to the general population are seen in younger age groups.
  - People with OA are more likely to have a body mass index (BMI) indicative of overweight or obesity compared to the general population. A pronounced difference is seen in young adults under 45.
  - While most people with OA have additional chronic conditions across all age groups, this is particularly striking in younger adults with OA compared to their peers in the general population.
  - Younger adults with OA are the most likely to report life dissatisfaction compared to older adults with OA or the general population.

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### About the data

These insights are derived from *Special Report: The Burden of Osteoarthritis in Canada (2021)* by Elizabeth M Badley, Jessica M Wilfong, Shatabdy Zahid, and Anthony V Perruccio at the Arthritis Community Research and Evaluation Unit (ACREU), commissioned by the Arthritis Society. The information in this report comes from integrating data from several representative national population surveys. These included the 2017-2018 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), the 2009 Survey on Living with Chronic Disease in Canada – Arthritis Component (SLCDC-A), and the ongoing Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA). The prevalence of OA was derived from individuals aged 20+ in the SLCDC-A who reported health professional-diagnosed OA or reported health professional-diagnosed arthritis of unknown type with OA-like pain in the knee, hip, or hand. The base population for estimating prevalence was the CCHS, the most recent and comprehensive source of the number of people with arthritis in Canada. Estimates were verified by comparison with estimates from the CLSA.

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