

# HEALTH REPORT

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### GPs urged to be on the alert for depression in arthritis patients

GPs are being urged to be aware of potential mental health problems, including depression, in arthritis patients, following the release of a national survey which found one-in-five arthritis patients suffer from depression.

National polling conducted for Arthritis Australia and the Pfizer Australia Health Report shows that arthritis can result in marked loss of confidence and self-esteem, anxiety and depression.

Dr Mona Marabani, rheumatologist and Vice President of Arthritis Australia said the number of patients reporting depression was a matter for concern.

One-in-three surveyed suffered anxiety related to their condition and another one-in-three said it had caused them to lose confidence.

"Too often, people don't discuss these problems with their family or doctor. GPs should try to assess whether their arthritis patients may be experiencing these difficulties," Dr Marabani said.

"The good news is people with arthritis regard their GP as their primary adviser, with 84 percent saying they would consult a doctor for more information about the condition."

Other sources of information were not widely accessed. For example, the Internet was cited by 26 percent, magazines 36 percent, state arthritis organisations 19 percent, and pharmacists by 16 percent.

One-third of people with arthritis said they had also caused family and friends stress because of their condition. Of these, around half felt the stress caused was "moderate" or "a lot".

When asked if they thought their arthritis would affect their health as they became older, one third of arthritis patients were either "extremely worried" or "very worried". Women were less concerned than men despite more women having arthritis.

The survey also has significant implications for employers with more than half (56 percent) of people with arthritis saying they have experienced difficulties in the workplace because of their condition.

Nearly 80 percent of those people reported their ability to perform tasks effectively had been reduced. Sixteen percent reported that their condition had forced them to take time off, and almost as many (15 percent) felt that having arthritis had reduced their employment opportunities.

People are largely seeking medical advice with 86 percent reporting having their arthritis diagnosed by a medical practitioner.

In terms of therapies thought to be helpful, 61 percent of arthritis patients surveyed felt prescription medicines would be helpful but only 18 percent thought over-the-counter medications to be helpful. There was high awareness of exercise being important but very few were aware that self-management courses could help them live better with arthritis.

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## Who is affected?

Of the more than 1500 people responding, 24 percent reported having arthritis with the incidence 10 percent higher among women.

People aged over 50 were three times more likely to have the condition. Significant numbers of people in the 31–50 age group (13 percent) reported having arthritis.

Fourteen percent of survey respondents diagnosed with arthritis report that they first noticed the condition between the ages of 30 and 39.

Another 21 percent say onset was between 40 and 49 and 26 percent between 50 and 59.

Copies of the Pfizer Australia Health Report can be obtained from the website [www.healthreport.com.au](http://www.healthreport.com.au) or by calling 1800 675 229.

**Issued on behalf of Arthritis Australia and Pfizer Australia by Hill & Knowlton.**

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Note to editors:

Designed by Arthritis Australia, the study was a self-completion survey involving 1623 people (living in 805 households) aged 16 years and over, conducted by independent consultant Stollznow Research. Participants were recruited by telephone and the surveys were completed in April 2004. Arthritis Australia received no funding as part of this project. Pfizer Australia is a supporter of the Arthritis Australia Community Chest that is administered by Medicines Australia under their Community Care Program.

