

# AOTC Monthly Newsletter

## ARTHRITIS IN THE SPRING SEASON



### IN LIKE A LION

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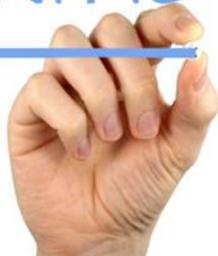
### SEASONAL CHANGE

There are some steps that you can take when the weather begins to shift in the spring to help lessen the pain. When it is cool and damp outside dress with extra layers of clothes or at home use a light blanket to stay warm.

### FACTS AND STATISTICS

From 2013- 2015, an estimated 54.4 million US adults (22.7%) annually had ever been told by a doctor that they had some form of arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, lupus, or fibromyalgia.

## ARTHRITIS



### ARTHRITIS FACTS

There are over 100 different forms of arthritis

Arthritis is the leading cause of disability in the United States

An estimated 50 million adult Americans report having some form of arthritis

## In Like a Lion

The past winter in North Florida was milder than normal, with the coldest temperatures in early January, mid- to late January, and early February. The rainfall was above normal in North Florida with some cold rainy days. Now that we are moving into the spring season, what can we expect for weather and how can that affect Rheumatoid Arthritis? The old folklore saying that, “March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb” may hold true for this spring as well. The month generally starts out with some rainy days and thunder storms then gradually becomes drier as we move in to April and May.



Extensive research has not been able to fully explain how the seasons or other environmental factors impact arthritic pain. Patients generally experience the most relief from joint pain during the fall season. While the weather may not affect all people in the same way it is generally noted that during the spring arthritic symptoms seem to be intensified.

Research has shown that this time of year tends to be worse for those managing arthritis than in the warmer months. The results of a 5-year study of fluctuations in rheumatoid arthritis (RA) disease activity using data from 2000 to 2005 showed a difference. The study concluded, “We found definite seasonal differences in RA patients, both subjectively and objectively. RA disease activity was higher in spring and lower during fall” (N. Iikuni et al, 2007). Another study conducted in 2009 discovered that individuals whose arthritis symptoms first appeared in winter and spring experienced more severe symptoms than those who first become symptomatic in the summer months (European League Against Rheumatism, 2009).

Seasonal changes may play an important role in evaluating disease activity of RA patients and should be taken into account when examining these patients. It is important to note that during this period, patients need to have a greater awareness of possible shifts in symptoms. Calling any changes in symptoms to the attention of your provider can help in making the proper changes in your treatment plan.



### References

European League Against Rheumatism. (2009, June 12). *Winter- And Spring-onset Rheumatoid Arthritis Patients Have Worse 6 Month Outcomes Than Those With Summer Onset*. Retrieved from ScienceDaily: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/06/090612115421.htm>

N. Iikuni et al. (2007, May 1). What's in season for rheumatoid arthritis patients? Seasonal fluctuations in disease activity. *Rheumatology*, 46(5), 846-848. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/rheumatology/ke414>

## Coping with Seasonal Change

There are some steps that you can take when the weather begins to shift in the spring to help lessen the pain. When it is cool and damp outside dress with extra layers of clothes or at home use a light blanket to stay warm. You may also take a warm shower or hot soak in the tub which helps increase your blood flow. Another approach is to use lotions or essential oils to massage your joints with.



During the unpleasant weather your instinct may be just hang out at home. Try exercising more as the exercise helps to ward off stiffness and increases endorphins which can help block pain. Establish a light-weight workout routine for those days. If the weather becomes really bad limit your outside activities. Incorporate a series of regular stretches and gentle exercises to help ward off pain. Try and establish a routine for in the morning after waking up and in the evening before you go to bed.

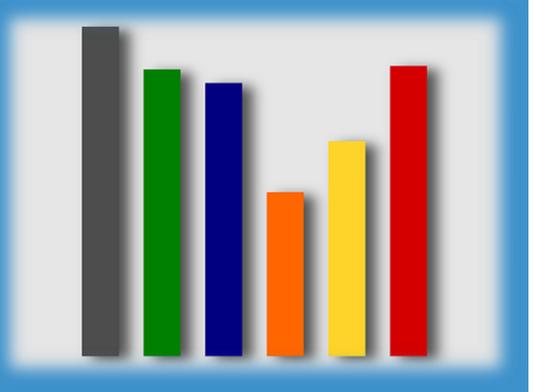
It will also help to control what you are eating as food substances can affect stiffness and swelling. You need to limit your sugar intake. Read the ingredients on the packages and avoid things like high-fructose corn. Adjust your diet to include items that are low in cholesterol and high in omega-3 fatty acids which can help with inflammation.

While you can't control the weather, you can make minor adjustments in your life-style that will help to moderate seasonal flare-ups. Most importantly, eating well and exercising is good for you no matter which season we are moving in to.



## Facts and Statistics

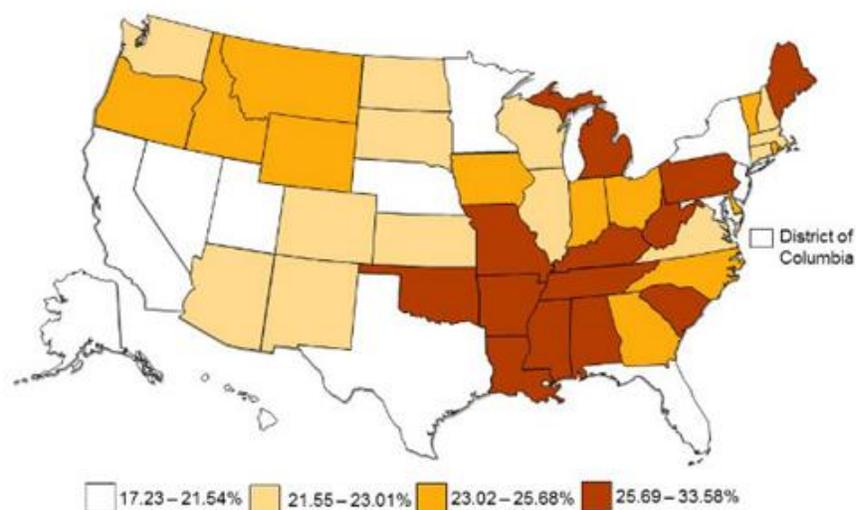
From 2013- 2015, an estimated 54.4 million US adults (22.7%) annually had ever been told by a doctor that they had some form of arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, lupus, or fibromyalgia.<sup>1</sup>



Common arthritis joint symptoms include swelling, pain, stiffness and decreased range of motion. Symptoms may come and go, and can be mild, moderate or severe. They may stay about the same for years but may progress or get worse over time. Severe arthritis can result in chronic pain, inability to do daily activities and make it difficult to walk or climb stairs. Arthritis can cause permanent joint changes.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports, the percentage of adults with arthritis varies by state, ranging from 17.2% in Hawaii to 33.6% in West Virginia in 2015.
- According to the CDC, the most common form of arthritis is osteoarthritis. Other common rheumatic conditions include gout, fibromyalgia, and rheumatoid arthritis.
- Physical activity can reduce pain and improve physical function by about 40 percent.
- By 2040, an estimated 78 million (26%) US adults ages 18 years or older are projected to have doctor-diagnosed arthritis.<sup>i</sup>

**Age-Adjusted Arthritis Prevalence Among Adults, 2015**



Source: 2015 BRFSS; CDC unpublished data.

<sup>i</sup> Hootman JM, Helmick CG, Barbour KE, Theis KA, Boring MA. Updated projected prevalence of self-reported doctor-diagnosed arthritis and arthritis-attributable activity limitation among US adults, 2015-2040. *Arthritis & Rheumatology*. 2016 Mar 25. [Epub ahead of print]. doi: 10.1002/art.39692. PubMed PMID: 27015600.