THE STATE OF MUSCULOSKELETAL

HEALTH 2024

Arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions in numbers

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Introduction & Methods

# 

# What is The State of Musculoskeletal Health?

The State of Musculoskeletal Health is a collection of the most up-to-date, UK-wide statistics on arthritis and other musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions. This includes how many people have these conditions, the number at risk of developing these conditions, the impact of these on a person, on the health system and society, and inequalities that can be found within all the topics above.

# Who is it for?

It is a resource for healthcare professionals, policy makers, public health leads, people with these conditions, and anyone interested in MSK health. We believe that with the best information you can build awareness, make more informed decisions, feel more confident and ultimately help more people with MSK conditions, such as arthritis.

# About Versus Arthritis

Over 10 million people in the UK have arthritis (1). That’s one in six people living with the pain, fatigue, lack of mobility and dexterity it can cause. The impact is huge as these conditions can intrude on everyday life – affecting the ability to work, care for a family, to move free from pain and live independently. Yet arthritis is often dismissed as an inevitable part of ageing or shrugged off as ‘just a bit of arthritis’. We don’t think this is OK. Versus Arthritis is here to change that.

Find out more about [Versus Arthritis here](https://www.versusarthritis.org/).

# Methods

Data, information, and insights about MSK conditions such as arthritis are available from numerous sources. At Versus Arthritis, we judge all evidence based on individual merit and ‘good evidence’ is evidence that accurately represents the needs, experiences, and perspectives of people with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions. Different types of evidence can help answer different types of questions. The key is to select evidence based on the question and what is most relevant and useful for answering it. Figure 1 depicts a hierarchy of evidence. It is important to note that while such frameworks have their merits in specific contexts, they are not without their limitations as ranking evidence in this way may indirectly favour certain sources of evidence over others.

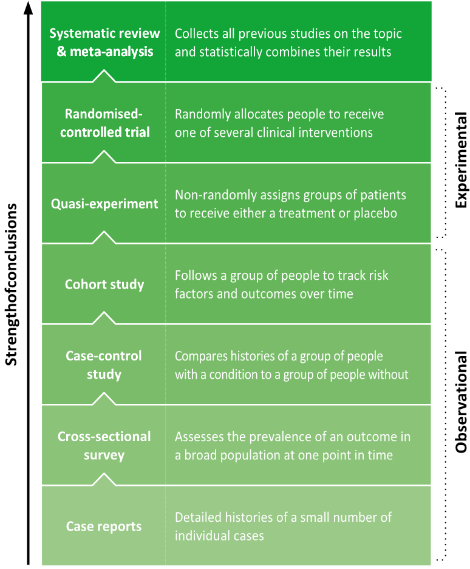


Figure 1. Hierarchy of Evidence (2)

The evidence in this report mainly comes from quantitative studies and real-world evidence. However, it also includes evidence that has been generated from other methodological approaches, some of which may not rank highly in such hierarchies. This kind of evidence, drawing on lived experience of MSK conditions such as arthritis, adds increased depth and context to some of the statistics we present in this report.

What is Arthritis?

Over 10 MILLION people in the UK have arthritis (1)

**Arthritis** refers to painful, stiff, or restricted joints. Arthritis symptoms are common in conditions that cause joint damage or inflammation. These include osteoarthritis, autoimmune inflammatory arthritis conditions including axial spondyloarthritis, crystal arthritis (such as gout), or as symptom of inflammatory connective tissue diseases (such as lupus).

Arthritis is also used as an umbrella term for a range of conditions where arthritis is their main symptom.

Most types of arthritis are long-term conditions. People with arthritis often have multiple long-term conditions. The most common type is osteoarthritis, where the body is unable to maintain and repair the joints leading to thinned and damaged cartilage, usually due to rising age or injury to a joint. Osteoarthritis mainly affects older adults and is uncommon below age 45 years.

Less common types of arthritis are autoimmune conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis and axial spondyloarthritis. Here the immune system attacks and inflames the joints and surrounding tissues causing swelling, pain, stiffness, and joint damage. Peak onset is usually in middle age, but these can strike at any age including juvenile arthritis (JIA) in childhood. Arthritis is also a common symptom in other, mainly rare autoimmune conditions, including lupus, sarcoid and Behçet's.

Conditions such as gout are types of crystal arthritis, where people have severe but self-limiting arthritis episodes caused by microscopic crystals being deposited in and around the joints.

Because people often have more than one type of arthritis at the same time (such as osteoarthritis alongside a form of inflammatory arthritis), the size of the population with arthritis can’t be estimated by simply adding up the numbers of the most common different types. The best current estimate is that between 10 and 11 million people in the UK have arthritis.

Population

How many people have arthritis?

There is no definitive figure of how many people have arthritis in the UK.

Instead, to create estimates of how many people have each type of arthritis, researchers rely on a range of data sources to estimate how many people have a particular condition. These data vary in both how they identify someone with arthritis, and their coverage across the UK population.

As data with different ways of identifying if someone has arthritis, or improved coverage of the population become available, researchers may update estimates. The underlying true prevalence can also change over time with changes in characteristics of the population, such as levels of obesity, poverty, and changes in ethnic mix.

The prevalence estimates we have are based on data from a sample of people, which is used to give an estimate of the true prevalence in the whole population of the UK. As these samples improve in their coverage of the population, the estimates will become more accurate.

**How do we know someone has arthritis?**

The first step to estimating prevalence of a condition is to define who will be included as ‘having the condition’. There are several definitions that can be used, depending on where someone is on their journey to diagnosis. The typical journey to diagnosis differs between conditions; for example, diagnosis of osteoarthritis may be possible by reviewing symptoms and performing a physical examination, while diagnosing JIA is likely to require referral to a specialist and further investigations.

(3)

How many people have arthritis?

**The prevalence of musculoskeletal conditions can be measured at different points on someone’s journey to diagnosis**

The person engages with the healthcare system about their symptoms. E.g. via their GP surgery.

The person has a confirmed diagnosis. This means they have a name and clear explanation for their symptoms.

The healthcare professional begins the diagnostic process.

This might include a physical examination, or input from a specialist.

The person experiences symptoms (such as stiff joints).

We can measure the number of people who have experienced particular symptoms or have identified that they have a particular condition through surveys.

Once the diagnosis is confirmed, the relevant clinical code may be added to the person’s notes.

At this point the healthcare professional may enter a code, for the symptoms or likely diagnosis, into the person’s healthcare record.

Examples of a clinical coding system are SNOMED or Read codes.

The anonymised national databases of healthcare data used for research purposes generally only include codes entered by healthcare professionals, not free text data. This means if no code is entered, or the incorrect code is used (even if the diagnosis is recorded in notes elsewhere in a patient’s records) researchers will not capture this in their analysis. This is likely to underestimate the true prevalence of the condition.

How many people have arthritis?

**What measures do our prevalence data use?**

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| --- |
| Estimates from those with a recorded diagnosis. |
| 450,000 adults have a recorded diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis (87). |
| 10,000 children have a recorded diagnosis of juvenile idiopathic arthritis (100). |
| 60,000 adults have a recorded diagnosis of axial spondyloarthritis (87). |

|  |
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| Estimates from those with a probable diagnosis. |
| 10 million adults have a probable diagnosis of osteoarthritis (1). |
| 1.6 million adults have a probable diagnosis of gout (77). |
| 220,000 adults have a probable diagnosis of axial spondyloarthritis (185). |
| 190,000 adults have a probable diagnosis of psoriatic arthritis (4). |

|  |
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| Estimates from those who self-report. |
| 11 million people report low back pain in any given year (3). |
| Between 18.4 million (12) and 28 million (118) people report chronic pain. |

What are Musculoskeletal conditions?

Musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions are characterised by problems with the muscles, bones, joints, and adjacent connective tissues leading to temporary or lifelong limitations in functioning and the ability to participate in everyday activities. They are typically characterised by pain and limitations in mobility and dexterity, including conditions such as arthritis conditions, back and neck pain, and fibromyalgia. Some musculoskeletal conditions like osteoporosis may be painless.

How many people have MSK Conditions?

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Around a **third** of the UK population, **over 20 million** people (20,295,706), live with an MSK condition (5).

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| The estimated number of people with a MSK condition in… | | | |
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| England is **17.1M** people  (32%). (2) | Scotland is  **1.7M** people  (33%). (2) | Wales is **974,000** people (32%). (2) | Northern Ireland is **525,000** people (29%). (2) |

**Children and long-term MSK conditions**

Two in 100 children (2%) aged under 16 years in England and Scotland report having a long-term MSK condition. (7) (10)

Estimated number of children (aged under 16 years) reporting a long-term1 MSK condition

* In England- **216,344** children (2%)
* In Scotland- **18,427** children (2%)

Health Inequalities

**Health inequalities are “unfair and avoidable differences in health across the population, and between different groups within society” (11).**

**Deprivation**

**Arthritis, MSK conditions and chronic pain are more common in areas of greater poverty.**

**Arthritis**

Chart, bar chart, waterfall chart

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The prevalence of hip osteoarthritis is higher in people living in the most deprived tenth of society than those living in the least deprived tenth (6).

The prevalence of knee osteoarthritis is higher in people living in the most deprived tenth of society than those living in the least deprived tenth (6).

**MSK conditions**

**Chart, bar chart

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People who live in the most deprived fifth of society are more likely to report arthritis or a long-term MSK condition compared to those living in the least deprived fifth.

**Chronic pain**

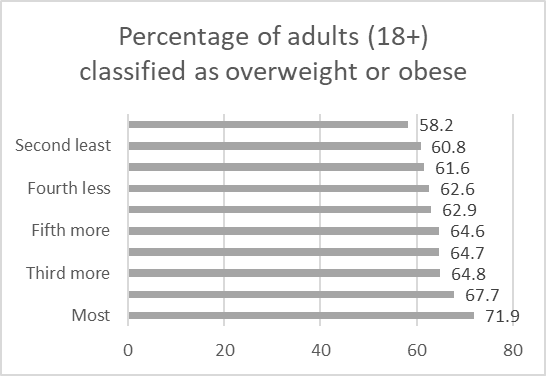
Chronic pain is linked to deprivation. Four in ten people (41%) who live in the most deprived fifth of society in England report chronic pain compared to 3 in 10 (30%) in the least deprived quintile (12).

**Overweight and physical inactivity**

**Arthritis**

The risk of developing osteoarthritis increases by 1% for each 1kg/m2 increase in BMI (Body Mass Index- an estimate of body fat based on weight and height) (13). The risk of developing osteoarthritis increases by 3% for every 5cm increase in waist circumference (13).

People who experience more deprivation are more likely to be overweight or obese than those experiencing less deprivation (14).



Deprived areas have increased prevalence of osteoarthritis. The increased prevalence of obesity in these areas accounts for 50% of the extra risk for knee osteoarthritis (15).

The risk of developing osteoarthritis increases by 1% for each 1kg/m2 increase in BMI.

The risk of developing osteoarthritis increases by 3% for every 5cm increase in waist circumference.

**Ethnicity**

**MSK conditions and chronic pain disproportionately affect some minority ethnic groups**

In England, Pakistani (20.8%), Black Caribbean (18.7%) and White British (16.8%) ethnic groups are the most likely to report a long-lasting MSK condition (16).

(11)

The Musculoskeletal health: trends, risk factors and disparities in England report provides data to expand awareness of disparities in MSK health at a national level. To find out more about this report please [click here](https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/static-reports/musculoskeletal-conditions/musculoskeletal-health-trends-risk-factors-and-disparities-in-england.html#21_Musculoskeletal_conditions).

**Chronic pain**

The prevalence of chronic pain differs between some ethnic groups (12).

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One England-based study found, 44% of Black people have chronic pain, compared with 34% of white people, 35% of Asian people, 34% of people of mixed ethnicity and 26% of people from other ethnicities (12). Another study in England found that people from Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic backgrounds have the highest rates of chronic pain of all ethnic groups (17).

To find out more on health inequalities and chronic pain you can read our report, [Chronic Pain in England: Unseen, Unequal, Unfair](https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/data-and-statistics/chronic-pain-in-england/)

**Age**

**Arthritis**

Osteoarthritis prevalence increases with age.

(18)

Most people are aged between 46 and 70 years old when diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (19).

**MSK conditions**

**MSK conditions affect people of all ages but become more common with increasing age.**

**2.8M** people aged under 35 years (11%) live with an MSK condition. (5)

**10.2M** people aged 35-64 years (40%) live with an MSK condition. (5)

**7.4M** people aged 65 and over (61%) live with an MSK condition. (5)

A graph of age groups

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**Differences between Men and Women**

Arthritis and MSK conditions have different prevalence between men and women.

**Arthritis**

Women are **2-3 times** more likely to develop rheumatoid arthritis than men (20).

Axial spondyloarthritis or radiological axial spondyloarthritis is **more frequently diagnosed in men** compared with women (3:1), whereas non-radiographic axial spondyloarthritis has an equal distribution between men and women (21).

Around 6M women have osteoarthritis in the UK compared to around 4M men (18).

**MSK conditions**

|  |  |
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| 11.6M women of all ages  (35% of women have a MSK condition). (5) | 8.7M men of all ages  (28% of men have a MSK condition). (5) |

**Chronic pain**

**38%** of women have chronic pain in England compared to **30%** of men (12).

**14%** of women have high-impact chronic pain compared to **9%** of men (12).

Person

# impact of arthritis and MSK conditions

# **Quality of life**

Quality of life can be measured using a self-reported Quality of Life score, a score of 1=perfect health. The presence of any long-term condition is associated with a drop in quality of life, (self-reported Quality of Life score of 0.79), but if arthritis or back pain is present as one of the long-term conditions the drop is greater (self-reported Quality of Life score of 0.71) (22).

Having arthritis or another MSK condition is one of the biggest contributors to years lived with disability (YLDs).

YLDs is a measure which combines the prevalence of a disease with a rating of how disabling that disease is (23).

Low back pain is the leading cause of YLDs (5).

**21%** of YLDs in the UK are accounted for by MSK conditions. (5)

|  |  |
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| Low back pain accounts for | 960,132 YLDs (5) |
| Neck pain accounts for | 370,075 YLDs (5) |
| Osteoarthritis accounts for | 314,504 YLDs (5) |
| Rheumatoid arthritis accounts for | 50,322 YLDs (5) |
| Gout accounts for | 21,760 YLDs (5). |

UK causes of YLDs are (5)

1. **Low back pain**
2. Diabetes
3. Depressive disorders
4. Headache disorders
5. Falls
6. **Neck pain**
7. Age-related hearing loss
8. **Osteoarthritis**
9. **Other MSK conditions**
10. Gynaecological

**Impact on daily activities**

Versus Arthritis surveyed people with MSK conditions to understand the factors that impact their lives.

(24)

Half of respondents reported they cannot do anything themselves to lessen the impact of their condition on their lives (24).

**Work**

Arthritis and MSK conditions can also impact a person's ability to work.

People with arthritis are **20%** less likely to be in work than someone without arthritis (25).

Arthritis was associated with an increased chance of job loss during the Covid-19 pandemic. When researchers analysed data on people who had a job in January-February 2020, it was found that by September 2021 people with arthritis were **3.4 percentage points** less likely to still be in employment compared to someone without a health condition (26).

**1 in 3** current UK employees have a long-term health condition. (27)

**1 in 10** current UK employees have a MSK condition. (27)

**1 in 3** employees with a long-term condition have not discussed their MSK condition with their employer. (28)

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|  | Percentage in employment (29) | Percentage economically inactive (29) |
| MSK condition | 62.4 | 34.9 |
| No long-term condition | 82.1 | 15.2 |

**23.4M** working days were lost in 2022 due to MSK conditions (30).

MSK conditions are the 3rd most common reason for working days lost, only behind ‘Other’ (including COVID-19) and ‘Minor Illnesses’. (30)

**14%** of sickness absence within the NHS in August 2023 was due to back problems and other MSK conditions (31) that’s **300,162** full time equivalent working days lost in one month (31).

(30)

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| **OVER HALF** | Of people (53%) we surveyed with MSK conditions say their symptoms have a negative impact on work (24). |
| **1 in 10** | people (5,660) receiving support from the UK’s access to work scheme in 2022-23 had an MSK condition (32). |
| **1 in 8** | Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants (13%) in Great Britain in May 2022 have a disease of the MSK system or connective tissue as their primary condition (33). |
| **MSK conditions remain the second most common diagnosis on fit notes written by GPs in England, after mental health conditions, in 2021 to 2022** (34). | |
| **OVER HALF** | Of fit notes issued (53%) for MSK conditions sited episodes lasting 5 or more weeks (34). |
| **17%** | Of fit notes issued to patients by GPs in England were for MSK conditions from Sept 2022 to Sept 2023 (34) |

Arthritis, MSK conditions and multiple long-term conditions

**Multiple long-term conditions, refers to when a single individual is living with two or more long-term conditions (multimorbidity).**

**1 in 4** adults in the UK live with two or more long-term conditions (35) (36).

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| **54%** | of people over 65 years old in England lived with multiple long-term conditions in 2015 (36). |
| **68%** | of people over 65 years old in England are expected to live with multiple long-term conditions by 2035 (36). |

The prevalence of people with 4 or more chronic conditions in the UK is expected to nearly double from **9.8% in 2018 to 17% in 2035** (37).

**Multiple long-term conditions are common in people with arthritis.**

People with osteoarthritis are **1.2 times** more likely to have an additional long-term condition than people without osteoarthritis (38).

People with osteoarthritis are **2.5 times** more likely to have three or more additional conditions than people without osteoarthritis (38).

People with OA are nearly **3 times** more likely to also have ischaemic heart disease or have heart failure than those without OA, probably because of shared underlying risk factors for these conditions (39).

People with arthritis have a 61% higher risk of having diabetes mellitus than those without arthritis (39).

The prevalence of depression in those with rheumatoid arthritis is **2-3 times** higher than those without the condition (40).

**Around 20%** of people with OA experience symptoms of depression and anxiety (41).

**MSK conditions are very common in people with multiple long-term conditions.**

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| 4in10 | people with multiple long-term conditions are living with a physical and a mental health condition. (35) (36) |
| 1in5 | adults (21%) aged 46-48 in Britain with multiple long-term conditions have recurrent back issues (42). |
| 1IN8 | people (13.4%) in England report living with at least two long-term conditions, one of which is MSK related. (6) |

**The prevalence of multiple long-term conditions increases with increasing age.**

**1 in 3** adults (34%) who are 46-68 years old live with multiple long-term conditions in Britain (42).

**6 in 10** people aged 65-84 years have multiple long-term conditions (35) (36).

**8 in 10** people aged 85 years or over have multiple long-term conditions (35) (36).

**Multimorbidity is associated with social deprivation**

People living in the most deprived areas are significantly more likely to report two or more conditions (35) and can expect to develop them **10-15 years earlier** than those in the least deprived. (36)

Adults from a more disadvantaged social class are at up to **43%** greater risk of having multiple long-term conditions in midlife (46-48 years) compared to those from a less disadvantaged social class (42).

Arthritis, MSK conditions and wider Health

People with arthritis, an MSK condition, or chronic pain are more likely to have wider health problems such as poor mental health, overweight and physical inactivity. The relationships here are complex. Some are because of shared risk factors such as deprivation. Some risk factors are causative, such as increased body weight contributing directly to knee osteoarthritis, or people struggling to be physically active because of painful arthritis or musculoskeletal conditions. These relationships can also be reciprocal, including where chronic pain worsens mental health, and poor mental health worsens chronic pain.

**Overweight and obesity**

Having overweight body weight or obesity can increase people’s risk of developing arthritis conditions such as osteoarthritis and Gout.

(10) (44) (45)

**6 in 10** adults in the UK have overweight body weight or obesity (43) (44) (45).

The risk of developing osteoarthritis increases by 1% for each 1kg/m2 increase in BMI (Body Mass Index- a measure of body fat based on weight and height) (13).

The risk of developing osteoarthritis increases by 3% for every 5cm increase in waist circumference (13).

**1 in 4** people with psoriatic arthritis have obesity (46).

**Around 7 in 10 adults** (16+) with a long-term MSK condition have overweight body weight or obesity (10) (44) (45).

Table

Description automatically generated**Over half** of adults (54%) in England with class 3 obesity report chronic pain (12).

Obesity directly damages weight-bearing joints, such as knees and hips, because of the abnormally high loads they have to carry (48). In nearly a quarter (24.6%) of people with new onset knee pain, the symptoms can be attributed to having either overweight body weight or obesity (49).

Average BMI of hip and knee replacement patients (47) (50):

* Hip (28.7) Overweight
* Knee (30.7) Obese

People who have obesity are:

|  |
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| 1.5-2.5 times more likely than someone with BMI in the ‘healthy’ range to have back pain (51) |
| 2 times more likely than someone with BMI in the ‘healthy’ range to develop gout and more likely to develop it at a younger age (52) |
| Have a significantly increased risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis (53) |

**Physical inactivity**

Being **physically inactive**, defined as doing less than 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a week (54), can increase people’s risk of developing particular MSK conditions.

Around 1 in 4 people in the UK are physically inactive (10) (44) (45) (55).

(10) (44) (45)

In the Northern Ireland Health survey **20%** of respondents reported 0 days where they had completed at least 30 minutes of physical activity (inactive) (55).

People with a long-term MSK condition are around twice as likely to report being physically inactive than those without (10) (44) (45).

60% of people with rheumatoid arthritis are physically inactive (56).

45% of people who are physically inactive in England have chronic pain (12).

Regular physical activity reduces people’s risk of:

* Hip and knee osteoarthritis pain by 6% (57)
* Joint and back pain by 25% (58)
* Depression by 25% (59)
* Hip fractures by 24% (60)
* Falls by 76% (61)

**Those struggling with their MSK conditions are less likely to be active but have the most to gain, if offered the right support**.

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| 6in10 | People (60%) surveyed with MSK conditions reported using physical activity as a way to manage their symptoms (24). |
| 7in10 | people (70%) surveyed with MSK conditions said they would like to be more active. (62) |
| 4in10 | people (36%) surveyed with MSK conditions who were active at least once a week said they exercised because it helped them with their pain. (24) |
| 8in10 | people (77%) surveyed withMSK conditions said they want practical support to help them be more physically active. (62) |
| over  half | of people **(56%)** surveyed with MSK conditions said that their pain, fatigue and dexterity were a significant barrier on their ability to be physically active. |

# **Mental health**

People with arthritis, MSK conditions or chronic pain are more likely to have mental health conditions.

* Around 20% of people with osteoarthritis experience symptoms of depression and anxiety (41).
* Around one-third of people with rheumatoid arthritis have mental health problems such as anxiety, depression (63).
* 1 in 5 people with Psoriatic Arthritis have depression (64).

The odds of having a self-reported mental health condition are 1.4 times as high in people with an MSK condition, compared with people with no MSK condition (6).

Depression is **4 times** more common among people in persistent pain compared to those without pain. (65)

Provision

A graph of a number of cases

Description automatically generated Access to care

**Joint replacements and waiting times**

An important treatment for osteoarthritis, when other less invasive interventions have not worked, is joint replacement surgery. Typically, this will be a replacement of the hip or knee.

(50)

The number of joint replacement surgeries conducted steadily increased from 2013 until 2020 where **around half** the number were conducted (50).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic these operations were delayed and therefore waiting lists for these operations grew across each of the four UK nations (66) (67) (68) (69).

In England the waiting list for Trauma and Orthopaedic treatment contains 857,307 people, 6% have waited over a year for treatment (November 2023 data) (66). 264,146 (31%) people on the list are waiting with a decision to be admitted to a hospital bed, 13% of these people have waited over a year (November 2023 data) (66). At the waiting list’s peak, in March 2021 in England, 17% of those on the list had been waiting over a year (66).

In Wales 98,396 people are waiting for Trauma and Orthopaedic treatment with 30% waiting over a year and 7% waiting over two years (November 2023 data) (70).

In Scotland 99,818 people are waiting for Trauma and Orthopaedic inpatient and outpatient treatment with 14% waiting for a year (September 2023 data) (71).

In Northern Ireland 46,645 people are waiting for Trauma and Orthopaedic inpatient and outpatient treatment with 50% waiting over a year (September 2023 data) (72).

**Joint replacement and health inequalities**

Those living in the most deprived areas of England and Wales are more likely to need a hip replacement than those in more affluent areas (73). Yet those living in deprived areas are less likely to receive an NHS funded hip replacement than those in more affluent areas (73).

**National inflammatory arthritis waiting times**

These data come from the National Early Inflammatory Arthritis Audit (NEIAA) which collects data from England and Wales (74).

56% of people with suspected inflammatory arthritis are referred within the target of 3 working days(74).

39%of people with suspected inflammatory arthritis are seen within 3 weeks of a rheumatology clinic receiving a referral (74).

56% of people with confirmed autoimmune inflammatory arthritis receive treatment within 6 weeks of receipt of referral (74).

**For all the NEIAA metrics there is significant geographical variation (74).**

In the Midlands 51% of people with suspected inflammatory arthritis are referred within the target of 3 working days compared to London where 62% of people with suspected inflammatory arthritis are referred within the target of 3 working days (74).

In Wales 25.4% of people with confirmed inflammatory arthritis are seen within 3 weeks of referral compared to the North East and Yorkshire where 50.9% of people with confirmed inflammatory arthritis are seen within 3 weeks of referral (74).

In the East of England 40.6% of people with confirmed autoimmune inflammatory arthritis start cDMARD therapy within 6 weeks of referral, compared to the South West where 79.2% of people with confirmed autoimmune inflammatory arthritis are seen within 6 weeks of referral (74).

Societal Impact

Impact on healthcare, social services, and the economy

**Health and Care Services**

Those with arthritis and MSK conditions are more likely to contact and use primary healthcare, secondary healthcare, and community healthcare such as physiotherapy.

|  |
| --- |
| MSK conditions accounted for 1.06M hospital admissions, 8.3% of the total number of hospital admissions in England in 2021-22 (75). |
| MSK conditions account for 1 IN 7 GP consultations (1). |
| Every year 1 IN 5 adults will consult their GP for a MSK condition (76). |
| 4 IN 10 people we surveyed see their GP as the main person they are supported by (24). |

People with arthritis and MSK conditions often take medicines to help manage their symptoms.

* Almost **1 in 2** people (47%) with long-term MSK conditions in England take **five or more** medicines on a regular basis (77)
* Over **30M prescriptions** were dispensed for MSK conditions and joint diseases in England 2022-2023 (78)
* Prescriptions for MSK conditions cost approximately **£139M** in England 2022-2023 (78)

**Social services**

Adults with chronic MSK pain have high levels of social care use in the UK (79). One study found that over half (54%) of those with Chronic pain received social care services in the last month (79).

**Economy**

Musculoskeletal ill-health results in significant costs for individuals, employers, the health service, and the wider economy.

|  |
| --- |
| The cost of working days lost due to osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis was estimated at £2.58 billion in 2017 rising to £3.43 billion by 2030 (80). |
| Treating the two most common forms of arthritis (osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis) is estimated to have cost the economy £10.2 billion in direct costs\* to the NHS and wider healthcare system in 2017. Cumulatively the healthcare cost will reach £118.6 billion over the next decade (80). |
| The total work-related costs of axial spondyloarthritis due to early retirement, absenteeism and presenteeism is estimated to be at £11,943 per person with axial spondyloarthritis per year (67). |
| MSK conditions accounted for the third largest area of NHS programme spending at £4.7 billion in 2013-14 (81). This was 3.5% of total spending in 2013-2014. If the proportion has stayed the same MSK conditions will have accounted for £5.5 billion spending in 2019-2020[[2]](#footnote-3) and an estimated £6.3 billion in 2022-2023 (81) (82). |
| Combined costs from worklessness and sickness absence in the UK amount to around £100 billion annually (83). |

Conditions where arthritis is the main symptom

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) happens when the body can no longer maintain and repair one or more joints – commonly affecting hands, hips, and knees. The cartilage becomes thin and uneven, preventing the joint from moving easily. The body’s attempts to repair these changes can lead to pain, stiffness and swelling.

Prevalence and incidence

**10 million** people have OA (1).

**3.2 million** people are estimated to have hip OA (3).

**5.4 million** people are estimated to have knee OA (3).

[[3]](#footnote-4)

Every year around **350,000 people** are diagnosed with OA (18).

Studies suggest that the median age of symptom onset of OA is approximately 55 years old, although severity of symptoms will vary (84) (85).

Almost half (49% of women and 42% of men) of people aged 75 or over have OA (1).

Risk factors

* Rising age- OA is uncommon in people under 45 years old
* Men and women- for most joints, OA is more common and more severe in women
* Inherited genetic and genomic factors
* Abnormal loading onto joints, because of abnormalities in joint shape, or overweight/obesity
* Inflammatory arthritis leading to loss of cartilage

OA and other long-term conditions

People with OA are nearly **3 times** more likely to also have ischaemic heart disease or have heart failure than those without OA, probably because of shared underlying risk factors for these conditions (39).

Wider health

Around **20%** of people with OA experience symptoms of depression and anxiety (41).

Gout

Gout is a is a type of inflammatory arthritis where the immune system, which is the body’s natural self-defence system, attacks joints and surrounding tissues where urate crystals have formed, causing episodes of severe inflammation, stiffness, pain, and damage. Urate crystals form in joints when the body’s urate (uric acid) level is consistently too high.

1.6 million (1 in 50) people have recorded diagnoses of gout (86).

**66,000 people** are newly diagnosed with gout each year (86).

Risk factors

|  |
| --- |
| Age- the risk increases with age |
| Men and women- gout is more common in men |
| Inherited genetic and genomic factors |
| Weight- being overweight or obese increases the risk of gout |
| Food and drink intake- some food and drink raise urate levels |
| Kidney disease |
| Medicines that increase urate levels |

Gout and other long-term conditions

Women and men with gout are **71%** and **22%** more likely to develop type 2 diabetes (179).

People with gout have a **29% higher risk** of chronic kidney disease than people without gout (180).

Recent evidence has also shown that flare up episodes of gout are associated with an increase in cardiovascular events in the 4 months following the flare (176).

Rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a type of inflammatory arthritis where the immune system attacks the body’s joints, causing inflammation, swelling, pain, stiffness and damage to the joints.

Prevalence and incidence

Wider health

60% of people with RA are physically inactive (56).

Around one-third of people with RA have mental health problems such as anxiety, depression (63)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **450,000** | adults have a recorded diagnosis of RA (87). |
| **27,000** | Adults are newly diagnosed with RA each year (87). |

Risk factors

Work

One-third people with RA quit work within 5 years of diagnosis (169)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Age | Most people are aged between 46 and 70 years old when diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (19) |
| Men and women | RA is 2-3 times more common in women than men |
| Smoking tobacco | Increases risk, worsens disease, and weakens treatment response (88) |
| Weight | Being clinically overweight or obese increases risk (89) |
| Inherited genetic, genomic, and epigenetic factors | |
| Changes in the microbiome (90) (91) | |

RA and other long-term conditions

Osteoporosis- weak bone, develops in around 30% of people with RA (168).

Evidence suggests 1 in 10 people with rheumatoid arthritis will be diagnosed with interstitial lung disease over the lifetime of their disease, putting them at increased risk of early death (181).

Psoriatic arthritis

Psoriatic arthritis (PsA) is a type of inflammatory arthritis linked to psoriasis where the immune system attacks the body’s joints, causing inflammation, swelling, stiffness, pain and damage to the joints.

**Psoriasis is an autoimmune condition affecting the skin and around 1 in 4 people who have psoriasis have psoriatic arthritis (92).**

Some people may develop psoriatic arthritis without noticeable skin psoriasis.

Prevalence and incidence

It is estimated that **190,000** adults have psoriatic arthritis (4).

Each year, around **8,430** adults are newly diagnosed with psoriatic arthritis (4).

Risk factors

|  |
| --- |
| Age- peak onset is between 30 and 50 years old |
| Inherited genetic, genomic and epigenetic factors (93) |

|  |
| --- |
| Psoriatic arthritis and other long-term conditions |
| Around 1 in 5 people (19%) with psoriatic arthritis have a cardiovascular disease (46). |
| Wider health |
| 1 in 4 Psoriatic arthritis patients have obesity (46). |
| 1 in 5 people with Psoriatic Arthritis have depression (64) |

Axial Spondyloarthritis

Axial spondyloarthritis is a type of inflammatory arthritis where the immune system attacks the spine and sometimes joints causing inflammation, stiffness, pain, and damage. Axial spondyloarthritis can be either ‘radiographic (r-axSpA)’ or ‘non-radiographic (nr-axSpA)’. In radiographic axial spondyloarthritis there are visible changes on X-rays. Radiographic axial spondyloarthritis was previously called ankylosing spondylitis (AS). In non-radiographic axial spondyloarthritis there are no changes visible on X-rays, but may be picked up on an MRI scan.

Prevalence and incidence

Assessment of healthcare records suggest 60,000 people have a confirmed diagnosis of axial spondyloarthritis (87). However, coding in both primary and secondary care remains an obstacle to having an accurate number of diagnoses and indeed one study in the UK suggests that the number of people with the condition could be approximately 220,000 (185).

Each year around **2,200** adults are newly diagnosed with axial spondyloarthritis (87).

Risk factors

|  |
| --- |
| Age: axial spondyloarthritis often presents in people’s late teens or twenties |
| Men and women: Axial Spondyloarthritis with changes on X-ray/MRI is more frequently diagnosed in men than women (3:1), but axial spondyloarthritis with a normal X-ray/MRI has an equal sex distribution (21) |
| Inherited genetic factors |
| Axial spondyloarthritis is more common in those with psoriasis (94) or inflammatory bowel disease (95) |

Axial spondyloarthritis and other long-term conditions

**21%** of people with axial spondyloarthritis will have a painful eye condition called uveitis which can cause blindness if untreated (94).

Around **1 in 5 (22.8%)** of people with axial spondyloarthritis have hypertension (96).

Around **1 in 10 (10.9%)** of people with axial spondyloarthritis have depression (96).

Work

In a study on men with ankylosing spondylitis, a type of axial spondyloarthritis, **45%** changed to a less physically demanding job due to their condition (97) (98).

In the same study **24%** reported retiring early, again, due to axial spondyloarthritis (97) (98).

Juvenile Idiopathic arthritis (JIA)

JIA refers to a group of arthritis conditions that present before children are 16 years old. Although JIA is a diagnosis given in children under 16 years old, this remains your diagnosis into adulthood. JIA are autoimmune diseases where the immune system attacks the body. There are different types of JIA, and the severity of the condition varies depending on the type (99).

Prevalence and incidence

It is estimated that **10,000** children under 16 years old have been diagnosed with JIA (100).

Risk factors

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Age- typical onset age is between 2 and 10 years | |
| Men and women- JIA is more common in girls |
| Inherited genetic, genomic and epigenetic factors |
| Changes in the microbiome |

JIA and other long-term conditions

|  |
| --- |
| Around half of children diagnosed with JIA will be discharged from care (perhaps due to medicine-free remission) (101) |

11-38% of children with JIA have JIA associated uveitis, an eye condition which can cause eye pain and if untreated can lead to blindness (102) (103).

Around 15% of children with JIA in the UK develop Macrophage Activation Syndrome (MAS)- a rare inflammatory condition (104).

Conditions where arthritis is one symptom among many

Lupus

Lupus (systemic lupus erythematosus, SLE) is a condition where the immune system, which is the body’s natural self-defence system, attacks the body. Lupus commonly affects the joints, causing arthritis with inflammation, swelling, stiffness, pain, and damage. It can also attack other organs including the skin, kidneys, lungs, and nervous system.

Prevalence and incidence

An estimated 70,000 people in the UK have Lupus (105).

3,000 people are newly diagnosed with Lupus each year (105).

Risk factors

|  |
| --- |
| Age- onset in women is typically between 15 and 40 years old |
| Men and women- Lupus is more common in women |
| Ethnic background- Lupus is especially common in women of African, Caribbean, and Chinese origin |
| Inherited genetic, genomic and epigenetic factors (106) |
| Changes in the microbiome (107) |

In patients with mild lupus, of more than 10 years duration, there is a **three- four times** increased risk of cardiovascular events and death compared with people who do not have lupus (159).

Patients with lupus have a mortality rate nearly **two times** higher than those without lupus (157).

Other Musculoskeletal Conditions

Chronic pain

**Pain is one of the leading symptoms of MSK conditions.**

**Chronic pain** – defined as pain which has lasted for more than three months - affects between **18.4 million** (34%) (12) and **28 million people** (43%) in the UK (118).

**Chronic pain in England**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 15.5M | people **(34%)** have chronic pain in England (12). | 5.5M | people **(12%)** have high-impact chronic pain, which is severe and where people are unable to carry out their daily activities (12). |

About **8 in every 10 people (84%)** with chronic pain in England report that at least some of their chronic pain is in the **neck or shoulder, back, limbs or extremities** – all sites where pain is most likely to be **musculoskeletal** (12).

A picture containing diagram

Description automatically generated

**More women are affected by chronic pain than men.**

**38%** of women have chronic pain in England compared to **30%** of men (12).

**14%** of women have high-impact chronic pain compared to **9%** of men (12).

**Chronic pain increases with increasing age, but people of all ages can have it.**

A picture containing graphical user interface

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Among young adults aged 16-34 with chronic pain in England, the proportion reporting high-impact chronic pain rose from 21% to 32% between 2011 and 2017 (12).

To find out more on chronic pain you can read our report, [Chronic Pain in England: Unseen, Unequal, Unfair](https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/data-and-statistics/chronic-pain-in-england/)

Chronic Pain in Scotland

In 2022, over a third (38%) of adults in Scotland were experiencing chronic pain (184). Although people of all ages can be impacted by chronic pain, prevalence increases with age (184). As was also seen in England, more women than men are affected by chronic pain in Scotland, 43% of women have chronic pain compared to 33% of men (184).

A group of people holding flags

Description automatically generated

The proportion of adults experiencing chronic pain is highest in the most deprived 5th of Scotland, where the proportion of adults reporting chronic pain is 21% higher than the proportion reporting chronic pain in the least deprived 5th (184).

Work

In 2022, 78% of adults experiencing chronic pain reported that it limited their life and work a lot (184).

Children

In 2022 6% of children reported experiencing chronic pain (184).

The most common type of chronic pain was in arms, hand, hips, leg or feet (184).

To read more about Chronic pain in Scotland visit [5 Chronic Pain - The Scottish Health Survey 2022 – volume 1: main report - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-health-survey-2022-volume-1-main-report/pages/9/)

Back pain

Back pain is a common MSK condition. Non-specific low back pain which has not been caused by damage or inflammation in the spine is the most common type.

**Low back pain is the top cause of years lived with disability in the UK (2019) (5).**

Prevalence and incidence

**11 million** people in the UK experience low back pain in any given year and of these 11 million, **6.5 million** experience severe back pain (3).

**2.6 million** new cases of low back pain occur each year in the UK (5).

[[4]](#footnote-5)

Prevalence

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Number of people with low back pain | Number of people with severe low back pain |
| England | 9,185,769 | 5,544,073 |
| Scotland | 847,863 | 523,811 |
| Wales | 477,054 | 273,719 |
| Northern Ireland | 253,448 | 152,968 |

Risk factors

|  |
| --- |
| Age- whilst back pain can occur at any age it’s not more common with age and seems to decline in the oldest people (108). |
| Men and women- back pain is more common in women |
| Weight- those who are overweight or obese are more likely to have lower back pain than those classified as having a normal weight (51). |
| Poor general health |
| Injury |

Wider health

The odds of back pain in people with symptoms of depression have been shown to be **50% higher** than in those without symptoms of depression (109).

Work

**As of March 2023, 995,000 people in the UK are economically inactive due to problems or disabilities connected to the back or neck (110).**

Around 1 in 5 workers with back pain take time off work over a period of 6 months or longer (111).

Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition, which is a form of chronic primary pain. Fibromyalgia does not itself cause any lasting damage on the body’s tissues but is associated with widespread pain, fatigue, physical symptoms, and cognitive symptoms.

Prevalence and incidence

Around 1.7-2.8 million (prevalence estimation varies due to variation in classification/diagnostic criteria) people have fibromyalgia (112).

270,000 Adolescents aged 11-18 years have fibromyalgia (113) (114).

Risk factors

* Age- fibromyalgia most commonly presents between 25 and 55 years
* Men and women- fibromyalgia is more common in women
* Inherited genetic, genomic, and epigenetic factors
* Changes in the microbiome (113)

Fibromyalgia and other long-term conditions

|  |
| --- |
| Fibromyalgia is associated with a 1.54-fold increased risk for irritable bowel syndrome (115)  Wider health  Lifetime prevalence of depression and anxiety in people with fibromyalgia go up to 70% and 60%, respectively. (116) (117) |
|  |

Osteoporosis and Fragility fractures

Osteoporosis is a silent condition where bones are weak and can break easily. A fragility fracture is a broken bone which results from a force that would not usually result in a fracture, such as a fall from standing height or less.

Prevalence

More than 3 million people in the UK are estimated to have osteoporosis (119).

Osteoporosis and other long-term conditions

Adults over 50 years old with osteoporosis are more than 2 times more likely to develop arthritis, chronic low back pain, chronic heart failure and depression than someone without osteoporosis (120).

Fractures

Around 75,000 hip fractures occur each year in the UK (121).

Hip fractures are associated with a total cost to health and social services of OVER £1 BILLION per year (121).

Around 3% of all broken hip bones (femoral fractures) in England and Wales in 2022 occurred in inpatient settings (122).

People who broke their hip (femoral fracture) while they were in hospital were 19% less likely to see a geriatrician within the 72-hour target than non-inpatients (122).

People who broke their hip (femoral fracture) while they were in hospital were 6% less likely to receive surgery within the 36-hour target than non-inpatients (122).

The economic burden of osteoporosis related fractures is approximately £4 Billion per year in the UK (123).

Glossary

**Cartilage:** a type of connective tissue found throughout the human body including within the joints (124).

**Comorbidity:** the occurrence of more than one illness or condition at the same time (125).

**Epigenetic**: refers to a factor that affects the expression of a gene without altering the DNA sequence (126).

**Fatigue**: severe mental and physical exhaustion which is not attributable to exertion (127).

**Genomics**: the study of all of a person’s genes (the genome) including the interactions of those genes with each other and the environment (128).

**Health Inequalities:** unfair and avoidable differences in health across the population, and between different groups within society” (11).

**Immune system**: the network of cells and tissues in your body that work to provide defence from viruses, bacteria, and other infections (129).

**Incidence**: the number of individuals who develop a specific disease during a particular time period (130). In this report the time period used is year.

**Microbiome**: refers to all of the microbes including bacteria, fungi and viruses that naturally live on and within our bodies (131).

**Phototherapy**: is a therapy prescribed by a dermatologist to treat Psoriasis. The skin is exposed to ultraviolet light on a regular basis (132).

**Prevalence**: the total number of individuals in a population who have a disease or health condition at a specific period of time (130).

**Quantitative**: refers to the numerical measure of something. In quantitative research a range of methods concerned with the systematic investigation of a phenomena are used, using statistical or numerical data. Quantitative research involves measurement and assumes that the phenomena under study can be measured. (133)

**Years Lived with Disability (YLDs)**: is a measure which summarises levels of disability in a given population, it combines the prevalence of a disease with a rating of how disabling that disease is (23).

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1. Northern Ireland has not been included in this graph as data for the prevalence of MSK conditions with varying deprivation is not available for Northern Ireland. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Data for 2019-2020 are shown here to demonstrate the increase prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Due to data unavailability, we have applied the prevalence rate of England to produce the totals for Northern Ireland. Please use this statistic with caution. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Due to data unavailability, we have applied the prevalence rate of England to produce the totals for Northern Ireland. Please use this statistic with caution. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)