

# Best Bone Health

How to manage  
arthritis with  
other associated  
conditions, so  
you get more  
out of life





# When It's Not Just Arthritis

Other health conditions often affect people with arthritis. Here's what to watch for **BY JACLYN LAW**

PEOPLE WITH ARTHRITIS often have other health conditions, known as comorbidities, that can affect their quality of life and influence treatment decisions. According to the 2014-2015 National Health Survey (NHS), 3.3 million Australians reported having arthritis and, of these, 2.4 million had one or more comorbidities.

Treating these conditions needs to be part of arthritis treatment. "We have to be aware of comorbidities and drug side effects, and treat the

comorbidities," says Professor Janet Pope, a rheumatologist. The following are a few of the health issues frequently seen in people with arthritis.

## Cardiovascular disease

The leading serious complication experienced by Australians with inflammatory conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, gout, lupus and psoriatic arthritis is cardiovascular disease. Ten per cent of people aged 45 and over, and 32 per cent of people aged 65 and over

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## To help lessen the impact of arthritis symptoms, it's essential to make healthy lifestyle choices

who had arthritis also reported having cardiovascular disease, according to the NHS.

### Depression

The impact of arthritis is not only physical. "Clinical depression is increased for all kinds of arthritis," notes Pope. The NHS revealed 21.5% of Australians aged 45 and over who have arthritis also experience depression. And, though not diagnosed as clinically depressed, many people with arthritis may still suffer with depressive symptoms due to the pain and potentially debilitating nature of arthritis symptoms.

### High Blood Pressure

Left untreated, hypertension can damage your blood vessels and lead to other health concerns, including heart problems, strokes or kidney failure. If you have both arthritis and high blood pressure, talk to your doctor about an appropriate treatment plan.

### Excess Weight

Being overweight is a risk factor for developing osteoarthritis. Among people who have arthritis, a high proportion are overweight or obese.



Excess weight puts further stress on the joints, especially the ankles, knees and hips.

### Focus on Healthy Living

To help prevent comorbidities and lessen the impact of arthritis symptoms, it's essential to make healthy lifestyle choices. Staying active can help you maintain a healthy weight, which can lower the risk of developing hypertension and other chronic conditions; it also lowers the burden on aching joints. Even modest weight loss can make a big difference.

To get started, talk to your doctor about starting a fitness routine. Relieving osteoarthritis pain with an over-the-counter medication can also help you stay active, but be sure to consult your doctor or pharmacist before taking – to avoid complicating your existing medication regime.

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# Joint Attack

Learning to manage  
rheumatoid arthritis

BY SAMANTHA RIDEOUT

ALTHOUGH NOBODY has figured out exactly why the immune system sometimes targets the healthy lining inside elbows, knees, wrists and other articulations, about one in 100 Australian adults knows how it feels. Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) can lead to severe inflammation and stiff, swollen joints, along with fatigue and a low fever.

RA can cause permanent damage if proper treatment isn't administered, and because the body's defences are busy attacking its own tissues, the risk of other health problems, such as cardiovascular disease, is also increased.

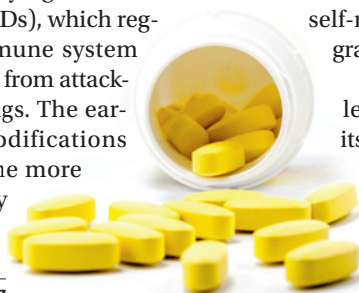
The customary first-line treatment is disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), which regulate the immune system and prevent it from attacking joint linings. The earlier these modifications are started, the more effective they are, says



Dr Linda Li, a researcher specialising in the management of arthritis.

In rare cases, DMARDs can pose serious risks. For example, methotrexate, a widely used treatment, can cause organ damage; patients taking it should be closely monitored. If your doctor suggests methotrexate – or any other new treatment – and you'd like to get more information, Arthritis Australia offers an information service called Arthritis Infoline (1800 011 041). This is a toll-free service staffed by health professionals and trained volunteers who can answer most questions about living with arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions, including self-management, community programmes and support groups.

Overall, Li says, the key is learning about the disease and its treatment options. The knowledge you gain will allow you to make the best decisions for your unique case.



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