

Obesity and physical inactivity poses arthritis risk, especially for women

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Researchers from the Toronto Western Research Institute noted a higher prevalence of arthritis and arthritis-attributable activity limitations (AAL) in the U.S. versus the Canadian population. The authors attribute the higher prevalence of arthritis and AAL to a greater level of obesity and physical inactivity in Americans, particularly women. Full findings of this study are published in the March issue of *Arthritis Care & Research*, a journal of the American College of Rheumatology.

Arthritis is the leading cause of physical disability, and one of the most frequently reported chronic conditions in the U.S. and Canada. Those in mid to late life are particularly vulnerable to this disabling condition, which is expected to increase in both countries due to the aging baby boomer population. According to a 2005 figure from the National Arthritis Data Workgroup more than 21% of American adults (46 million) have arthritis or another rheumatic condition and over 60% of arthritis patients are [women](#). The 2008 Canadian Community Health Survey reported 15.3% (4.3 million) of Canadians have some form of arthritis, with more women than men affected.

This study is the first to provide a direct comparison of U.S. and Canadian data in search of between-country disparities associated with the prevalence of arthritis and AAL. The authors analyzed results from the Joint Canada/United States Survey of Health (JCUSH) conducted in cooperation by Statistics Canada and the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics during 2002-2003. Data were obtained for 3,505 Canadians and 5,183 Americans with an overall response rate of 65.5% and 50.2%,

respectively.

Results show that in the U.S. the prevalence of arthritis was 18.7% and AAL was 9.6%, while equivalent estimates in Canada were 16.8% and 7.7%, respectively. Researchers noted that arthritis prevalence was higher in American women at 23.3% compared with 19.6% of Canadian women. Women in the U.S. also had a higher prevalence of AAL than Canadian women at 13.0% versus 9.2%. The overall occurrence of arthritis and AAL in men was similar in both countries at roughly 14% and 6%, respectively.

"Our study results suggest that the higher prevalence of arthritis and AAL in the U.S. may be a consequence of greater [obesity](#) and [physical inactivity](#) in that country, particularly in women," noted Dr. Badley.

"Public health initiatives that promote healthy weight and physical activity may benefit from including arthritis concerns to its message, and could potentially reduce the incidence of [arthritis](#) and AAL," concluded Dr. Badley.

More information: "Arthritis and Arthritis-Attributable Activity Limitations in the United States and Canada: A Cross-Border Comparison." Elizabeth Badley and Hina Ansari. Arthritis Care and Research; Published Online: February 25, 2010 ([DOI: 10.1002/acr.20100](#)); Print Issue Date: March 2010.

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