

2 in 5 adults with rheumatoid arthritis are physically inactive

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A new study, funded by a grant from the National Institute for Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), found that two in five adults (42%) with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) were inactive. Taking measures to motivate RA patients to increase their physical activity will improve public health according to the findings now available in *Arthritis Care & Research*, a journal published by Wiley-Blackwell on behalf of the American College of Rheumatology (ACR).

The ACR estimates nearly 1.3 million [adults](#) in the U.S. are diagnosed with RA, a chronic autoimmune condition characterized by systemic joint inflammation that can damage joints, impair function, and cause significant disability. Until the early 1980s, medical experts recommended medication and rest for those with [arthritis](#). However, current medical evidence now suggests that regular, moderate physical activity benefits arthritis sufferers by maintaining joint flexibility, improving balance, strengthening muscles, and reducing pain.

"While there is much evidence of the benefits of physical activity, RA patients are generally not physically active, and physicians often do not encourage regular physical activity in this patient population," explains Dr. Jungwha Lee, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Preventive Medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, Illinois. "Our study aims to expand understanding of the risk factors associated with inactivity among adults with RA and encourage clinical interventions that promote participation in physical activity."

Dr. Lee and colleagues analyzed data on 176 RA patients, 18 years of age or older enrolled in a randomized controlled trial to assess the effectiveness of an intervention promoting physical activity. The team evaluated pre-intervention data for inactivity which was defined as no sustained 10-minute periods of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity during a week. Researchers also assessed the relationships between inactivity and modifiable risk factors such as motivation for physical activity, obesity, and pain.

Results show that 42% of RA patients were inactive; participating in no moderate-to-vigorous physical activity periods of at least ten minutes during a 7-day period of objective activity monitoring. Researchers found that 53% of study participants lacked strong motivation for physical activity and 49% lacked strong beliefs in the benefits of physical activity. These two modifiable risk factors account for 65% of excess inactivity in this study group.

While previous research relied on self-reported physical activity measures, the strength of the current study lies in the use of accelerometers—a device used to measure acceleration and movement—to objectively assess physical activity in participants. "Physical inactivity among RA patients is a public health concern," concludes Dr. Lee. "Our results suggest that [public health](#) initiatives need to address the lack of motivation to exercise and promote the benefits of [physical activity](#) to reduce the prevalence of inactivity in those with RA."

More information: "The Public Health Impact of Risk Factors for Physical Inactivity in Adults with Rheumatoid Arthritis." Jungwha Lee, Dorothy Dunlop, Linda Ehrlich-Jones, Pamela Semanik, Jing Song, Larry Manheim, Rowland W. Chang. *Arthritis Care & Research*; Published Online: January 26, 2012 ([DOI: 10.1002/acr.21582](https://doi.org/10.1002/acr.21582)).

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