

1 in 4 U.S. adults disabled by arthritis: CDC

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(HealthDay)—Arthritis is expanding its grip on Americans, with 24 million adults limited in their everyday activities because of the debilitating joint disease, U.S. health officials say.

Overall, 54 million adults—or one in four—report an arthritis diagnosis. And the number of people disabled by it has jumped 20 percent since 2002, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Tuesday.

"Arthritis symptoms keep millions of Americans from going about their daily routines," CDC acting director Dr. Anne Schuchat said in an agency news release.

The joint aches, stiffness and swelling of arthritis can make holding a glass, carrying a grocery bag, or walking a short distance difficult or even impossible, the agency said.

Why so many Americans have arthritis isn't clear, and can't be attributed solely to an aging population. Almost two of five adults with arthritis are of working age—18 to 64 years old, the CDC said.

The most common types are osteoarthritis, which is age-related wear and tear; [rheumatoid arthritis](#); gout; lupus; and fibromyalgia, the CDC reported.

Arthritis costs at least \$81 billion in direct medical costs annually, the agency said.

Although narcotic painkillers are often prescribed for arthritis, other options are safer, the CDC added.

Instead of opioids, doctors and loved ones can encourage people with arthritis to exercise and watch their weight. "Physical activity is a proven strategy to ease pain and reduce symptoms among people with arthritis," Schuchat said.

Exercise—such as walking, swimming or biking—can reduce symptoms

by as much as 40 percent. Yet, about one-third of adults with arthritis aren't active, the CDC noted in its March 7 *Vital Signs*.

Self-management education is another important arthritis tool that doctors need to recommend, the report co-author said.

Along with physical activity, "it is just as important for them [doctors] to motivate their patients to attend workshops to learn how to better manage their arthritis," said epidemiologist Kamil Barbour, of the CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

People are more likely to attend an education program if a health care provider recommends it. But to date, only 1 in 10 Americans has participated in this type of program, the CDC reported.

The report also found that arthritis frequently occurs with other health conditions, namely heart disease, diabetes or obesity. These conditions become harder to manage with [arthritis](#), the agency said.

More information: SOURCE: *Vital Signs*, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 7, 2017

The U.S. National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases has more about [arthritis](#).

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