

Lockdown impact: Worsening symptoms for people with bone, joint and muscle pain

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People with bone, joint and muscle pain saw their symptoms worsen

during lockdown—according to new research from the University of East Anglia.

A new study published today shows that the majority of people with [musculoskeletal pain](#) reported increased symptoms—as the nation adhered to new government restrictions designed to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And those who experienced most [social isolation](#) and loneliness were less likely to access healthcare.

The findings are the result of a survey of more than 600 people across the UK to see how people with bone, joint and muscle [pain](#) coped in [lockdown](#).

The study was led by Dr. Toby Smith, from UEA's School of Health Sciences, and Prof Alex MacGregor, from UEA's Norwich Medical School.

Dr. Toby Smith said: "Bone, joint and muscle pain is a major cause of disability for people across the UK. People with these problems often experience pain, joint stiffness, fatigue and muscle weaknesses.

"Bone, joint and muscle diseases are frequently managed with a combination of physical activity and medications.

"Our results show that the coronavirus pandemic is a major challenge to people's health and wellbeing, both to young and older people.

"When lockdown happened, we were worried that this may become a much greater problem—particularly for those with bone, joint and [muscle pain](#).

"We wanted to know how the new restrictions might be affect pain, and better-understand who is most at risk of experiencing flare-ups, or reduced wellbeing due to social isolation and loneliness."

The team launched an [online survey](#) in late April, five weeks after the start of lockdown in a group of 678 patients with a range of musculoskeletal diseases—to see how the restrictions impacted their wellbeing and ability to access healthcare.

Prof MacGregor, who also works at the Rheumatology Department at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital (NNUH), said: "We found that the majority of survey participants, just over 53 percent, reported that their musculoskeletal symptoms had worsened since the start of lockdown.

"A third of patients reported needing to access either their GP or hospital rheumatology department. As might be expected, those who accessed healthcare reported significantly greater pain, stiffness and poorer general health.

"And we found that those who reported greater social isolation and loneliness were less likely to access healthcare.

"Most respondents, just over 88 percent, reported little difficulty accessing medication, but 44 percent of needed the assistance of others to do this.

"This survey, conducted in the early stages of the UK lockdown, suggests that there have been immediate negative consequences for people with musculoskeletal disease.

"Despite the swift transformations in the configuration of healthcare that have taken place, patients have in the main been able to access primary

care and hospital rheumatology departments. However, those with higher levels of social isolation access [healthcare](#) the least.

"Should further isolation measures need to be enforced as we have seen in some part of the UK as the pandemic continues, particular efforts should be made to protect and support the socially isolated as a vulnerable group.

"Healthcare providers should reach out to individual patients who do not come forward for advice, and who might be silently struggling with their disease," he added.

"Accessing health services for musculoskeletal diseases during early COVID-19 lockdown: results from a UK population survey" is published in the journal *Rheumatology: Advances in Practice*.

More information: Toby O Smith et al. Accessing health services for musculoskeletal diseases during early COVID-19 lockdown: results from a UK population survey, *Rheumatology Advances in Practice* (2020).
[DOI: 10.1093/rap/rkaa047](https://doi.org/10.1093/rap/rkaa047)

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