

Military service found to not increase risk of arthritis

August 12 2021



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Scottish veterans are no more likely to develop arthritis leading to hip or knee replacement than members of the wider population, according to new research.

The study—from the University of Glasgow in partnership with Forces in Mind Trust, and published in *BMJ Military Health*—looked at the risk of veterans having to undergo a lower limb joint replacement in comparison with people who had never served and found that for knee replacement, their risk was no different from non-veterans, whilst for hip replacement it was slightly less.

Lower limb injuries and [musculoskeletal disorders](#) are the commonest cause of medical discharge from the Armed Forces, but it was not known whether this might lead to problems in later life which might impact on veterans' care and mobility needs.

Lead researcher Dr. Beverly Bergman, Honorary Clinical Associate Professor and leader of the Scottish Veterans Health Research Group at the University of Glasgow—who was recently awarded an OBE for her work on veterans—said: "This study is really important because [military service](#) involves a lot of physical activity and training, and lower limb pain is common. Our results are very reassuring, particularly for older veterans who started doing a lot more running when the Fit to Fight program was introduced about 40 years ago.

"We found that people who had served for longest, and had experienced many more years of physical training, also had the same risk as people with very short service, providing strong evidence that this level of physical activity does not increase the risk of arthritis in later life. In our other studies we have shown that longer-serving veterans have better heart health, which also underlines the benefit of exercise."

Thomas McBarnet, Director of Programmes at Forces in Mind Trust, said that "most ex-Service personnel transition to civilian life successfully, their lives enriched by their time in Service. But if there are [health risks](#) which may be linked to time spent in the Armed Forces, it's important that we understand what they are so the right support can be

provided.

"We are pleased to see these reassuring results, and Forces in Mind Trust will continue to work with Dr. Beverly Bergman OBE and her team to build a better understanding of the [health](#) risks ex-Service personnel may face."

The [retrospective cohort study](#), using data from the Trends in Scottish Veterans' Health Study, looked at 78,000 veterans and 253,000 non-veterans in Scotland born between 1945 and 1995, matched for age, sex and area of residence. The study used survival analysis to examine the risk of joint replacement in veterans compared with non-veterans.

The study, "Hip and [knee replacement](#) as a proxy measure for lower limb osteoarthritis in Scottish military veterans," is published in *BMJ Military Health*.

More information: Beverly P Bergman et al, Hip and knee replacement as a proxy measure for lower limb osteoarthritis in Scottish military veterans, *BMJ Military Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjilitary-2021-001913](#)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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