

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a qualitative study of people with arthritis in Ontario. The study was conducted to provide insight into the daily lives of people who live with arthritis and the self-management strategies they use to manage their disease in the community. Given the current emphasis on chronic disease management, this report attempts to set arthritis self-management strategies in the context of broader chronic disease management.

Key Findings

- A qualitative study of 19 adults with a diagnosis of arthritis in Ontario was conducted. Participants had a mean age of 56 years and were predominantly female.
- Participants reported that arthritis had a broad impact on all aspects of their daily lives. Six themes emerged to describe the impact of arthritis: activities of daily living; community, leisure and social participation; work; family; financial management; and emotional well being.
- The self-management strategies participants described to manage their arthritis were grouped into the following most common strategies:
 - Information and Education
 - Activity and Behaviour Modifications
 - Environmental Changes
 - Exercise
 - Assistive Devices and Aids
 - Orthoses
 - Nutrition
 - Conventional Medications
 - Topical Treatments
 - Alternative and Complementary Care
 - Social Support and Positive Thinking
- Participants reported previous and/or ongoing consultation with health care providers such as primary care physicians (n=19), physiotherapists (n=17), and rheumatologists (n=14). Participants also sought out community resources to help them self-manage their disease including The Arthritis Society, support groups, exercise and pool programs.
- The financial and emotional stresses reported in this study presented challenges equal to the physical challenges for many participants. These findings are similar to those found in other research and suggest that care for people with arthritis should extend beyond physical disease management and include emotional support.
- An integral component of a model of chronic disease management is integration of health services, education and advice to support and empower people to manage their disease. Some self-management strategies are disease-specific (e.g. joint protection) while others are more general to all chronic diseases (e.g. social support, problem solving skills).
- It is key that health care providers be aware of resources outside the health care system, such as peer support, self-management/education programs and community programs that may assist people to self-manage their condition.