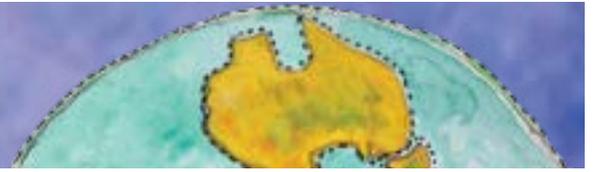


4.5 Arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions



Arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions, such as back problems and osteoporosis, affect the bones, muscles and joints.

Many Australians, young and old, are affected by these conditions, which vary in duration, severity, complications and associated disability, and can severely affect a person's health and quality of life. This places a substantial burden on the community, including through the use of hospital and other health services and lost productivity due to pain and disability.

How common are these conditions?

In Australia in 2011–12:

- An estimated 6.1 million people (28% of the total population) had arthritis and/or another musculoskeletal condition.
- Arthritis was the most common condition, affecting 3.3 million people (15% of the population), including 8% with osteoarthritis and 2% with rheumatoid arthritis. The prevalence is higher in females than males (18% compared with 12%) and increases with age (affecting 52% of people aged 75 or over).
- Back problems and disc disorders affect about 2.8 million people (13% of the population). The rates are highest among people aged 65–74.
- An estimated 725,500 people (3% of the population) reported that they had been diagnosed with osteoporosis or low bone density (osteopenia). Most cases were reported by women (82%) and people aged 55 and over (83%) (ABS 2012). As these conditions have no overt symptoms, the figures may be underestimated.
- An estimated 64,200 children aged 0–14 had arthritis or another musculoskeletal condition (ABS 2012). Juvenile arthritis affected less than 1% of Australian children.

Impact

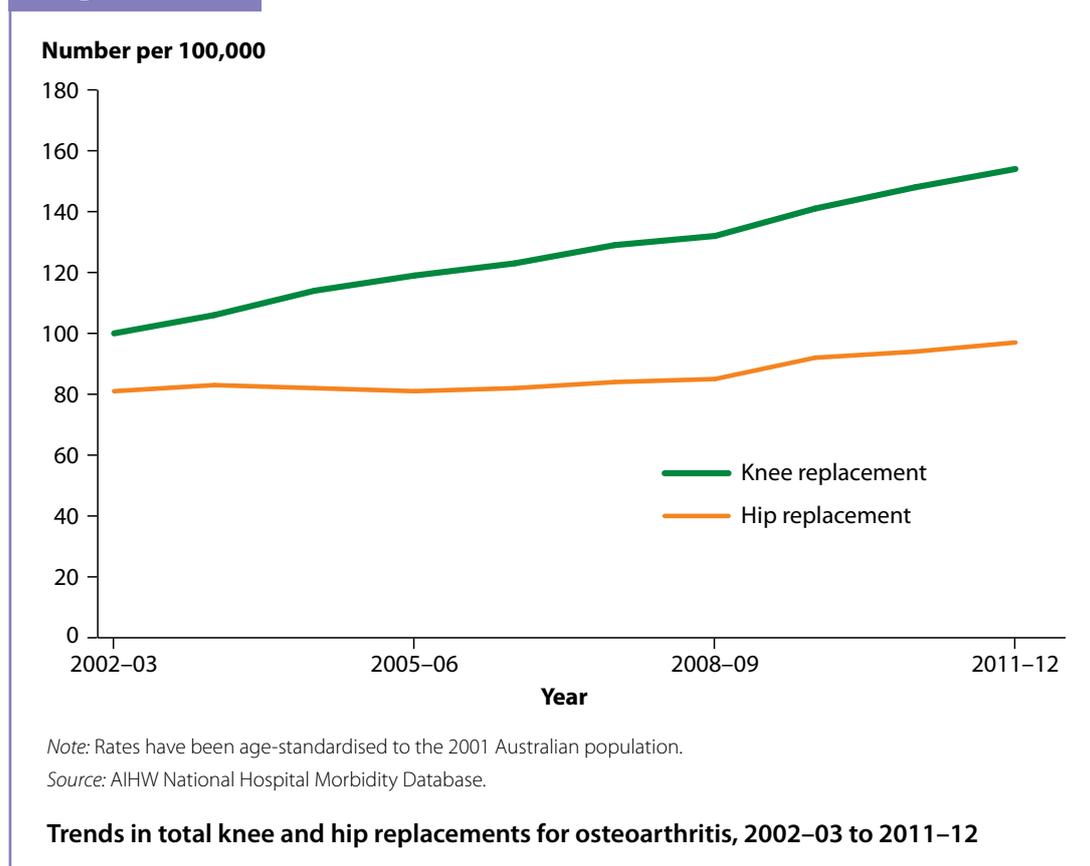
People with arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions were more likely to report:

- limitations in performing core activities (particularly self-care and mobility) than the overall population (44% compared with 15%)
- high or very high psychological distress (17%) than people without these conditions (9%)
- experiencing mental disorders than those without these conditions (1.5 times as high).

Health care

- These conditions are predominantly managed in primary health care settings by a range of health professionals and involving a combination of medication, physical therapy, self-management education and (where necessary) referral to specialist care.
- Survey data suggest these conditions were managed by general practitioners in about 18 per 100 patient encounters in 2012–13 (Britt et al. 2013).
- In 2011–12, there were 494,228 hospitalisations of people with a principal diagnosis of a musculoskeletal condition.
- There were 62,751 total joint replacements performed (38,679 knee and 24,072 hip) in people with osteoarthritis in 2011–12. Knee replacement was most common among females aged 75–79. Hip replacement was more common among males up to the age of 59 and females aged 60 and over.
- The number and rate of total joint replacements increased over the 10 years to 2011–12 (see Figure 4.8). The overall rate of knee replacement increased by 54% and hip replacement by 20%.

Figure 4.8



What is missing from the picture?

The prevention, management and treatment of these conditions beyond hospital settings cannot be examined in detail because of a lack of information about primary health care.

There is no information about the use of vitamins, nutritional supplements and over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, such as paracetamol, which are often used to manage musculoskeletal conditions (RACGP 2009a, 2009b, 2010). Prescription pharmaceutical data can be used in some specific circumstances to better understand management, but is limited because it lacks information about the diagnosis for which the medication was prescribed.

There is also a substantial lack of data on the impact of these conditions, for example, in terms of quality of life and costs (although there are some estimates of direct health expenditure).

Where do I go for more information?

More information on arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions in Australia is available at www.aihw.gov.au/arthritis-and-musculoskeletal-conditions/. The report *When musculoskeletal conditions and mental disorders occur together* is available for free download. More information will also be available in the forthcoming AIHW reports *Arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions across the life stages* and *Data sources for monitoring arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions*.

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