

Arthritis and the Military Ask: Create a Dedicated Arthritis Program at the Department of Defense (DoD)

Some Facts About Arthritis and the Military

- 1 in 4 veterans has doctor-diagnosed arthritis, compared to 1 in 5 civilians.
- Osteoarthritis (OA) is the second most common reason soldiers are discharged from the Army.
- OA rates are 26% higher in the under 20-year age group, compared with the same age group in the general population.
- Individuals over age 40 were twice as likely to develop arthritis after returning to civilian life.
- Wounded warriors will need costly life-long care for this progressively degenerative condition.
- Soldiers injured by roadside bombs and other blasts were often diagnosed with the condition within 2 years of being injured, versus civilian injuries where onset of arthritis usually occurs 10 years later.

Why Soldiers Are More Prone to Arthritis:

- Even in basic training, soldiers are carrying 60-100+ lb. packs that can injure and weaken their joints, which can lead to arthritis.
- Combat risks increase the risk for arthritis: for example, shock waves from bomb blasts can cause early joint damage, which in turn may lead to early onset arthritis.
- Post-traumatic osteoarthritis can be severely disabling and debilitating. High-impact injuries can cause bone loss, soft-tissue damage, and open and contaminated wounds prone to infection.
- Soldiers are often injured at a young age, which translates to more years of joint-related symptoms, activity limitations, and risks associated with medical procedures.

How Further Arthritis Research Can Help:

- Research can help identify better joint injury management to reduce the effects of joint degeneration in this population.
- Research can help identify ways to lessen joint injury during military training (it is important to study people after a joint injury rather than just looking at people who have already been diagnosed with osteoarthritis).
- Research on the genetics and epigenetics of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) can help us better understand what causes RA, which can lead to more effective treatments with fewer side effects for all people with arthritis

Why Department of Defense (DoD)-Funded Arthritis Research is Key:

- There is a growing burden of arthritis among active duty military and veteran populations.
- Arthritis will negatively affect the ability of active duty members to perform their duties and limits the quality of life for veterans.
- Arthritis is responsible for rising DoD and VA health care costs because of its impact on disease management, joint pain, loss of function, and joint replacement surgery.
- Currently, arthritis and clinical care research on both active duty military and veteran populations is significantly limited.

Why Does this Matter to You?

Research that helps military and veterans will benefit all people with arthritis. DoD research is trying to:

- Identify what triggers RA
- Find better treatments for RA with fewer side effects
- Identify a treatment for OA
- Find a way to prevent OA from occurring in the first place

What You Are Asking Congress to Do:

- Create a stand-alone arthritis research program at the Department of Defense funded at \$20 million.
- They can do this by submitting a letter of request to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense.
- Deadlines for Members of Congress to submit letters of request is March 25th