

A SILENT ENEMY

WINTER 2016



The Arthritis Foundation Is Leading The Way For Our Military

As the Champion of Yes for all people with arthritis, the Arthritis Foundation is committed to helping ease their pain and finding a cure. We also believe it's our duty to support America's veterans and service members, who are disproportionately affected by arthritis.

One way we're leading the fight is by putting a spotlight on how arthritis is impacting our armed forces. We've taken the latest research data and turned it into a compelling case for public policy change. We believe that arthritis research supporting better prevention strategies, interventions and treatments should be a top national health priority – and we're rallying Arthritis Foundation Advocates, the physician community and veteran and military organizations to push for **\$20 million in dedicated arthritis research funding.**

How Arthritis Is Threatening Veterans and the U.S. Military

One of every three veterans and service members in the United States lives with arthritis, a serious, chronic and complex disease that affects one in five Americans in the general population. Arthritis carries with it enormous physical, financial and societal costs, but for veterans and service members, the costs are multiplied. Today, arthritis is among the most chronic conditions veterans and service members face.

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most frequent reason active duty personnel are deemed unfit for duty. A 10-year review of arthritis among active duty personnel found OA rates to be 26 percent higher in the under-20 age group, compared with the same age group in the general population. A study of post-traumatic OA caused by battlefield injuries found that arthritis was the most common unfitting condition, with 94.4 percent of cases attributed to combat injury. Traumatic anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries occur frequently among service members – and can lead to the development of

arthritis and possible joint reconstruction within 20 years. In fact, between 2,500 to 3,000 ACL reconstructions are performed every year in U.S. military hospitals. Musculoskeletal injuries are pervasive, and represent 68 percent of all limited-duty orders, even in non-combat units.

What Military Personnel With Arthritis Have in Common

One in three veterans has arthritis (34.7 percent), compared to one in five civilians. Individuals over age 40 are twice as likely to develop arthritis after returning to civilian life. Wounded service members often require costly lifelong care for this progressively degenerative condition. Service members injured by roadside bombs and other blasts are often diagnosed with the condition within two years of being injured, versus civilian injuries where onset of arthritis usually occurs 10 years later. Arthritis also complicates chronic disease management among veterans. More than half of veterans with heart disease or diabetes also have arthritis. Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is known to increase the risk of cardiovascular disease; data from the Veterans Affairs (VA) Rheumatoid Arthritis Registry confirms that the mortality rate of veterans with RA is more than double the rate among those without RA.

Why Service Members Are More Prone to Arthritis



Even in basic training, new recruits are carrying 60-100+ lb. packs that can injure and weaken their joints, which can lead to arthritis. Combat injuries also 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 OA can be severely disabling and debilitating. Service members 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 ways to lessen joint injury during military training and service. More research on post-traumatic

OA can lead to the development of interventions at the time of injury that can mitigate the impact of arthritis, and possibly prevent it altogether. In addition, research on the genetics and epigenetics of rheumatoid arthritis can help us better understand what causes RA, which can lead to more effective treatments with fewer side effects.

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

There is a growing burden of arthritis among active duty and veteran populations. Arthritis negatively affects the ability of active duty service members to perform their duties, and it limits the quality of life for veterans. Arthritis is responsible for rising health care costs because of its impact. Currently, arthritis and clinical care research – on both active duty military and veteran populations – is very limited.

Arthritis research has been funded at the DoD since Fiscal Year 2009 in the Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP) within the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP). Since then, Congress has authorized up to four arthritis topics, including OA, post-traumatic OA, RA and arthritis overall. To date, a total of 29 grants have been funded. However, arthritis can be crowded out by the 37 other authorized topics in the PRMRP, so funding is not guaranteed.

Arthritis Foundation Recommendation

The Arthritis Foundation is leading the fight for the arthritis community, asking Congress to create a stand-alone arthritis program within the DoD's Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program – **funded at \$20 million**. This would guarantee dedicated research funding to meet the growing needs of active duty personnel and veterans. Moreover, arthritis research that helps our military and veteran populations will benefit everyone with arthritis, which is the number one cause of disability in the United States.

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