

Funded by:	Australian Rheumatology Association-ARA
Recipient:	Julia New-Tolley
Intended Department	The University of Adelaide
Project:	Rheumatoid Arthritis and exercise in Australia

Lay summary:

I am very grateful for the support of the Arthritis Australia scholarship sponsored by the ARA Research Fund. Support from this scholarship has enabled the development of key research skills and facilitated the undertaking of a project examining the patterns of physical activity among people living with rheumatoid arthritis in South Australia.

Overview:

Physical activity has been shown to improve function in rheumatoid arthritis, as well as reduce the risk of related health concerns including cardiovascular risk, loss of muscle mass related to chronic disease and osteoporosis. Physical activity in line with the World Health Organisation recommendations is recommended as a standard of care.

It is recommended that all Australian adults be active for 30 minutes on most days of the week and do some exercise that increases strength for at least 10 minutes twice a week. However, people with rheumatoid arthritis face extra challenges to stay active.

The purpose of this project was to get a snapshot of how people with Rheumatoid arthritis engaged in physical activity in South Australia. We then looked at the most common barriers to physical activity, in the hope of being able to target support to those areas in the future.

What problems did you try to solve, or gaps in knowledge did you try to fill?

Prior to this project, we did not have any information about participation in physical activity amongst people living with rheumatoid arthritis in Australia.

What did you discover during the course of the grant?

We discovered that while 67% of participants reported participation in regular aerobic activity, only 24% of participants participated in both the aerobic and muscle strengthening activity recommended by the Australian guidelines.

We found that those who met the physical activity guidelines were less likely to have high disease activity, and were less likely to consider symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis a barrier. We also found that people who felt confident and informed regarding physical activity were more likely to be meeting physical activity guidelines. The need for more detailed physical activity advice from health practitioners was identified as an area of unmet need.

**Have the findings of the research already benefited people with musculoskeletal disease?
How might the findings inform further research to help sufferers in the future?**

One of the key findings of this study is the low uptake of physical activity, particularly, muscle strengthening activity amongst people with RA. We think that focus should be given to education regarding the various ways strengthening may be introduced safely into regular programs.

During this project I had the opportunity to be part of a committee involved in the development of a website called Moving with Arthritis. This website has a number of useful resources regarding physical activity and arthritis, including information and online programs that can help people get started with muscle strengthening activities.

The website can be accessed here: <https://movingwitharthritis.org.au/>

Are you planning to continue the research?

This research forms part of a larger project for a Master of Clinic Science through Adelaide University.

The second part of this project will look at how health professional address physical activity in consults with people who have rheumatoid arthritis. We hope to explore some of the conflicting information people receive about physical activity and arthritis, in order to support both people living with rheumatoid arthritis, and the health professionals involved in their care.