

Arthritis

Introduction

Arthritis is a group of diseases that involve inflammation of one or more joints. The inflammation may occur in response to injury to a joint, the presence of an infection, an attack on the joint by the body itself (autoimmune disease), or accumulated wear and tear. Chronic arthritis occurs when prolonged inflammation results in long-term pain and deformity (Cush and Lipsky 2005).

Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis and usually results from accumulated wear and tear. It is common in the elderly and usually affects the hip and knee joints. Other types of arthritis include rheumatoid arthritis (caused by autoimmune disease) and gout (caused by the formation of uric acid crystals in the joints, which leads to inflammation).

What were the survey questions?

In the 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey, adult participants were asked if they had ever been told by a doctor they have arthritis. If so, they were then asked what kind of arthritis, which joints were affected first, the age they were diagnosed, and if they currently have any treatment for arthritis.

Please note that 7% of survey respondents ever diagnosed with arthritis did not know the type of arthritis; these respondents were excluded from the analysis by type of arthritis.

Arthritis is rare for children. The figures presented here are for the adult population only.

Prevalence of arthritis for adults

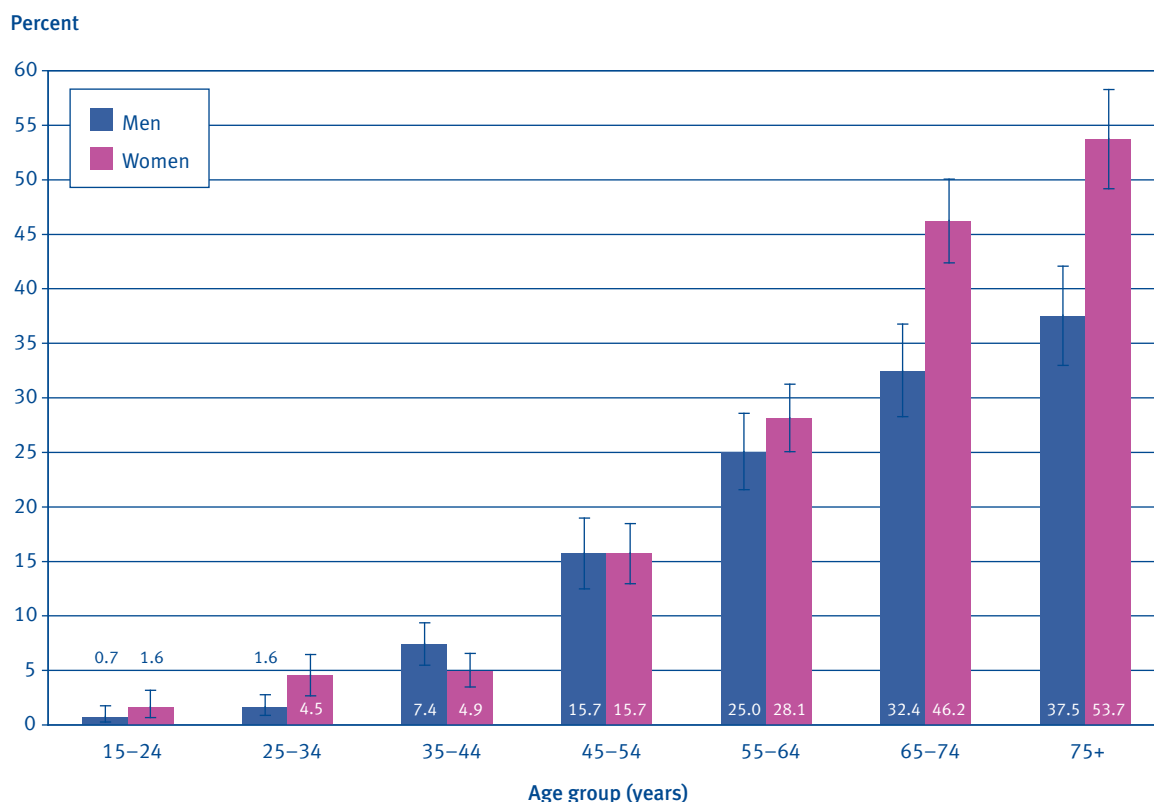
One in seven adults (14.8%, 14.2–15.3) had been told by a doctor they have arthritis. This equates to 460,500 adults. The age standardised prevalence of arthritis was higher in women (13.2%, 12.3–14.0) than in men (10.9%, 10.2–11.7). Osteoarthritis was the most common type of arthritis (8.4%, 7.9–8.8), followed by rheumatoid arthritis (3.5%, 3.1–3.9), then gout (1.3%, 1.1–1.5).

Adjusted for age, osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis were more common in women (7.8%, 7.1–8.4 and 3.7%, 3.1–4.3 respectively) than in men (5.3%, 4.7–5.9 and 2.3%, 1.8–2.7 respectively), whereas gout was more common in men (2.0%, 1.7–2.4) than in women (0.2%, 0.1–0.3).

Prevalence of arthritis, by age group

In both men and women the prevalence of arthritis increased rapidly as age increased, especially in women. More than half of women aged 75 years and over had been diagnosed with arthritis (Figure 3.29).

Figure 3.29: Arthritis for adults, by age group and gender (unadjusted prevalence)



Source: 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey

Prevalence of arthritis, by ethnic group

Table 3.19 gives an indication of the burden of arthritis for adults in New Zealand's main ethnic population groups.

Table 3.19: Arthritis for adults, by ethnic group (unadjusted)

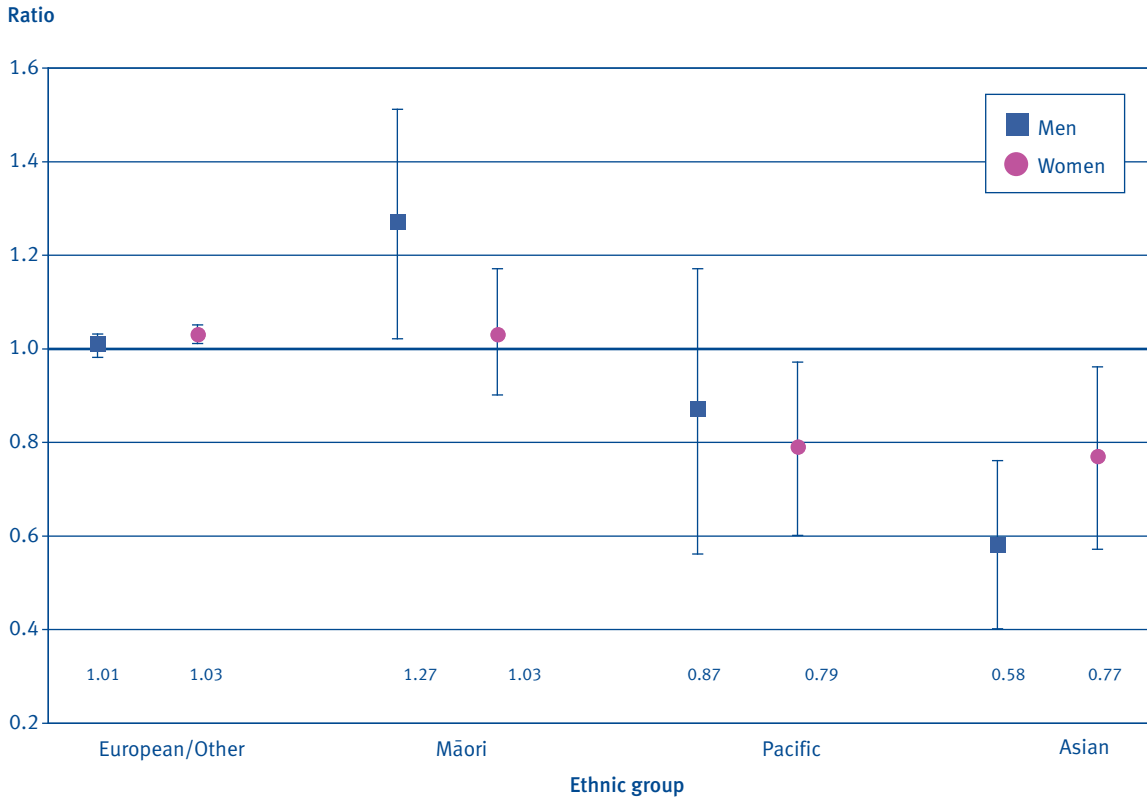
Ethnic group	Prevalence (95% CI)	Number of adults
European/ Other	16.1 (15.4–16.8)	411300
Māori	11.1 (9.8–12.4)	39500
Pacific	7.9 (6.1–9.8)	13000
Asian	6.2 (5.1–7.2)	17200

Source: 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey

Note: Total response standard output for ethnic groups has been used.

After adjusting for age, Māori men had an increased prevalence of arthritis compared to men in the total population. Pacific women and Asian men and women had a significantly lower prevalence of arthritis than men and women in the total population (Figure 3.30). European/Other women had a slightly higher prevalence of arthritis, mostly due to an increased prevalence of osteoarthritis (SRR: 1.05, 1.03–1.07).

Figure 3.30: Arthritis for adults, by ethnic group and gender (age standardised rate ratio)



Source: 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey

Notes: Age standardised to the WHO world population. Reference group, with a rate ratio of 1.00 (indicated by the bold line), is the total male or female population aged 15 years and over. Total response standard output for ethnic groups has been used.

Prevalence of arthritis, by neighbourhood deprivation

There were no significant differences in the prevalence of arthritis between NZDep2006 quintile 1 (least deprived) and quintile 5 (most deprived) for both men and women.

Treatment for arthritis

One in six adults with arthritis (17.4%, 15.3–19.5) had had surgery for arthritis, such as joint replacement or joint corrective surgery. Nearly half of all adults with arthritis (46.1%, 43.5–48.7) used medications, tablets or pills, including creams and ointments. A small number of adults with arthritis (2.4%, 1.4–3.3) received injections to treat their arthritis.

Nearly half of all adults with arthritis (45.6%, 42.9–48.3) did not currently use any treatment.

Time trends in prevalence of arthritis

Between 2002/03 and 2006/07 there was a small decline in the proportion of men (from 12.4% to 11.0%, p-value < 0.05) and women (from 14.4% to 13.1%, p-value=0.05) who were diagnosed with arthritis, adjusted for age. There was no change in the prevalence of diagnosed arthritis in Māori men and women between 2002/03 and 2006/07.