

Providing

reliable and up to date information to improve the understanding of arthritis and osteoporosis

Promoting

healthy lifestyles and self-management to optimise health

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joinNTed

The newsletter of
The Arthritis Foundation of the
Northern Territory Inc.
Trading as



rthritis & Osteoporosis NT

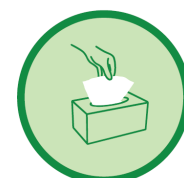
February 2022

Living with Covid-19

Evidence shows that a booster vaccination provides excellent protection from serious illness if infected by Omicron, while two dose vaccination, unfortunately, may not be all that effective at prevention.

A reminder from Associate Professor Tony Kenna, of Scleroderma Assoc Queensland Inc Medical Advisory Panel: “Sadly, I think there’s an inevitability to almost everyone getting COVID in the next six to 12 months but we all need to continue to take sensible precautions - *avoid crowds, wear masks, wash and sanitize hands regularly.*”

Mask hygiene is important too: masks should be replaced regularly, either disposed of appropriately or thoroughly washed and dried.



STAY HOME IF YOU ARE SICK

WELCOME BACK

... and thank you to all those members who have renewed their membership. We are now regularly producing six newsletters each year and look forward to hearing from our members on how to make these even more relevant and informative. Maybe you have a story to tell or would like to share a recipe.

Suggestions for future articles very welcome.

Simply call or email the office and we can work together!!

Messages can be left at any time on 89485232 or info@aont.org.au.

Practical Tips for People with Rheumatoid Arthritis, Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) and other autoimmune inflammatory rheumatic diseases (AIRDs) in the COVID-19 pandemic - 7th January 2022

How can I reduce my risk of getting COVID-19

- Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself and those around you.
- All patients with AIRD should have the COVID-19 vaccine.

Other things you can do to reduce your risk

- Wear a mask, ensuring it is worn correctly.
- Regular hand washing and good personal hygiene practices continue to be vital.
- Maintain social distancing and avoid crowded or indoor venues.
- Work from home where you can.

How can I prepare my household for COVID-19?

- Think about who would be able to look after your kids, pets and other dependants if you become unwell.
- Ensure you have enough prescriptions and medicines for two weeks in case you have to isolate.
- Ensure you have access to a thermometer, masks, hand sanitizer, simple pain relief, throat lozenges, tissues and sufficient food if you are unable to have it delivered.

I have tested positive for COVID-19: what should I do?

- EVEN IF YOU DO NOT HAVE SYMPTOMS, IF YOU TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19, CONTACT YOUR RHEUMATOLOGY TEAM.
- Contact your team for advice specific for you. Decisions on treatment should be made on a case-by-case basis.
- If you are on glucocorticoids/steroids (e.g. prednisolone) do not stop them suddenly. Seek advice from your treating team.
- Do not have visitors to your house while you are isolating.
- Get food and other things delivered whenever possible.

What else can I do to stay healthy?

Maintain regular habits to keep your immune system as strong as possible:

- Eat a healthy diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Ensure you exercise each day especially when isolated.
- Get plenty of sleep — aim for eight hours each night.

This page is an extract only from one of the latest consumer information sheets developed by the Australian Rheumatology Association - 7th January 2022.



For a printed copy of either of the full articles ring the office on -Freecall 1800 011 041 or (08)8948 5232.

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Peak bodies for musculoskeletal health

Arthritis & Osteoporosis NT is affiliated with the following two national bodies. We obtain our information sheets and booklets from them, providing up to date and accurate information for our clients - a vital part of our service.



As the peak arthritis body in Australia, the goal is to improve the quality of life for all people with arthritis and to eliminate their suffering.

To this end Arthritis Australia has collaborated over the years with arthritis organisations in ACT, New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia on a range of projects to improve outcomes for those living with arthritis.

As well as their general website, AA has developed several condition specific interactive websites: for osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis and back pain. Check them out at:

<https://arthritisaustralia.com.au/get-support/our-websites/>

Working with the Australian Rheumatology

Association, Arthritis Australia produces many booklets and information sheets. For those who are not able to access the Arthritis Australia website,

these are all readily available through our office in Rapid Creek. As well as producing consumer education materials, Arthritis Australia also has a National Research Program to further the understanding of arthritis and search for cures.



Australian
Rheumatology
Association



Healthy Bones Australia was originally established in 2001 as Osteoporosis Australia, in response to the growing number of Australians with poor bone health and the lack of focus on preventing osteoporosis. At the official rebranding in February 2021 Healthy Bones Australia called for all Australians to “prioritise their bone health” by learning the risk factors for, and how best to prevent, brittle bones and osteoporosis.

For those of us who have already developed osteoporosis it is vital to learn about treatment and management options. Information about osteoporosis is available at <https://healthybonesaustralia.org.au/>

Fact sheets produced by Healthy Bones Australia are also available from our office.

Top tips for gardening with arthritis

Gardening can be a great activity for both your body and your mind. However, for people with arthritis, working in an awkward position or doing too much at once can leave you feeling sore and exhausted. Below are some suggestions to help you reduce pain and stiffness while avoiding over-exertion, so that you can continue to enjoy your time spent in the garden. Page 7 outlines some precautions to take when gardening in the tropics.



1. Plan ahead

Spending some time in advance to plan out what you want to do, how you will do it and who can help will save you effort and time in the long run. Having a clear idea of how much you can reasonably accomplish in a day and scheduling different tasks for different days will help you avoid overdoing it. Organize cool drink bottles for the day, even if you intend to be outside for only a little while. Make sure you have a healthy snack ready for later, eg fruit or a sandwich. Timely hydration and nutrition can make a big difference to recovery. Keeping on top of hydration is vital for joint mobility too.

2. Warm up

As with any physical activity, it's important to warm up beforehand. Ease into light tasks first to get your heart and body going.

3. Start low and go slow

Think of gradually increasing both the amount of time you're active and the effort you make while gardening. You can plan to complete a task over the course of a week rather than trying to get everything done the first day.

4. Pace yourself

While it may be tempting to keep on at a task to get it out of the way, this could leave you feeling stiff and sore the next day. Take time to "stop and smell the roses." You may want to set a time limit and alarm beforehand, 30 or 40 minutes for example, and hold yourself to it.

5. Take frequent stretch breaks

Staying in the same position for too long can lead to stiffness and pain. Schedule frequent stretch breaks for yourself. It might help to set an alarm to remind you to take a 10-minute break every hour at least (and listen to it!) - an opportunity to take a drink break.

6. Lighten the load with assistive devices

Many gardening activities can put extra stress on your joints. Fortunately, there are a number of products available that can help make gardening easier for people with arthritis. For example a lightweight hose puts less strain on your hands and arms, or a garden kneeler seat can be used for kneeling and sitting. Tools with larger grips or extended lengths can also make many tasks easier with arthritis.

7. Change tasks

Change tasks often so that different parts of your body are being used. Change from work that is hard on the legs and back to a task that requires your arms or hands more. If you've been kneeling for a while, try a task in a standing or seated position. Remember to keep good posture.

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Meet another Board member

Aminul Islam: As a long term resident of Darwin, Amin first joined the board of Arthritis & Osteoporosis NT in 2020 and is also a volunteer board/committee member on a number of other Not-For-Profit entities. Now retired, Amin brings a wealth of experience to our board, in the fields of accounting, auditing, risk management, managing organisations and probity audits.



There are further unfilled positions for non-executive board members. On Monday and Tuesday mornings both our Secretary Hilary and our Treasurer Ruth are usually available in the office to answers your questions about board membership. They would love to hear from you!

Palmerston Support Group

The group will have its first meeting for the year on Monday 21st February. At the February and March meetings there will be a guest speaker from St John Ambulance to share first aid tips - valuable information for many family situations.

As usual, having a chat and sharing common interests, experiences and ideas over a cup of tea or coffee means feeling better when you leave than when you arrived!



The group meets monthly:

- at the Brennan Electorate Office, Palmerston Shopping Centre (opposite Target)
- on the third Monday of each month at 10:00 am



Sponsorship opportunity

We look forward to hearing from members and friends with suggestions on how to best source some modest sponsorship to assist with the printing and postage costs of newsletters.

Membership survey

The Board is currently designing a membership survey to include in the next newsletter. However, members are always most welcome to contact the office at any time with suggestions or queries.



Apricot chicken pasta salad

Delicious and extremely easy to prepare!

Ingredients

- 300g spiral pasta
- 1/2 cup whole egg mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 2 tbsp apricot jam
- 1 tsp curry powder
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1/3 cup dried apricots, chopped
- 1/2 punnet cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 Lebanese cucumber, diced
- 2 shallots, sliced
- 1 cup cooked chicken, shredded
- 1 tbsp coriander, chopped



Method

1. Cook pasta according to packet instructions. Drain and refresh under cold water.
2. Combine mayonnaise, sour cream, apricot jam, curry powder and lemon juice in a large bowl. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Add cooled cooked pasta and remaining ingredients, and stir to ensure everything is well coated in the dressing. Serve straightaway or refrigerate for several hours to allow flavours to develop.

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Patient Information on the COVID-19 vaccination in autoimmune inflammatory rheumatic diseases (AIRDs)

Why is it important for me to have the COVID-19 vaccine?

When the immune system is affected by arthritis or the drugs used to treat the condition, the risk from COVID-19 may be increased. Vaccination reduces your chance of getting COVID-19 or if you get it, it will probably be milder.

What vaccines are available?

Currently in Australia, AstraZeneca, Pfizer and Moderna. **All of these are suitable for patients whose immune system may not be strong.**

Protection from COVID-19

All the vaccines are very good at stopping severe symptoms and hospitalization. All the vaccines require a second dose. A third primary dose may be required to complete the primary vaccine course for people who have not had a strong response to the first two. Check with your GP regarding your possible need of a third dose.

A **booster** dose is an additional vaccine after the primary course has been completed.

All patients with AIRD should have a booster dose after completing the primary course.

Will the drugs that I am taking affect the way the vaccine works?

You may need a third dose but **do not stop your treatment** because this could result in a flare-up.

Gardening tips (Continued)

Continued from Page 4

8. Bring the garden to you

Consider raised planters or an elevated container garden. It is often easier working from a seated or standing position rather than having to bend down or kneel.

9. Cover up

Some types of arthritis and some inflammatory arthritis medications can make individuals more sensitive to the sun. It's important to stay well-covered if you are spending a significant amount of time outdoors. Wear lightweight clothes and use sunscreen; don't forget to cover areas that might become exposed when bending over, such as the small of your back, your neck and your ankles.

10. Protect your joints

Try to avoid heavy lifting by carrying smaller loads rather than one big load, or use a cart with wheels to transport heavier items. If you have friends or family available to help, delegate the more challenging tasks to them.

Adapted from "Top 10 Tips for Gardening with Arthritis" created with expert advice from:

Ilene Cohen Ackerman, OT Reg. (Ont.) Occupational Therapist and Clinical Practice Lead
Arthritis Society Canada arthritis.ca

Notable risks associated with gardening in the tropics

Dehydration and heat stress - prevention is the key:

1. Have some part-frozen water bottles handy and drink freely throughout your gardening session.
2. Work in the shade as much as you can.
3. Avoid the hottest part of the day, especially for the heavier jobs.

Cellulitis - is a bacterial infection under the skin surface and often starts with a small cut sustained gardening, camping, fishing, hunting or playing sports. In the early stages, cellulitis can cause redness, warmth, swelling and pain. Whether it's a cut, a scratch or even an insect bite you get while enjoying these outdoor activities, don't ignore it. Do something about it: clean it with an antiseptic and cover it with a dressing and a bandage. Seek medical help immediately if it gets worse.

Melioidosis - a Top End Wet Season risk, melioidosis is a serious disease that can kill. Treatment with antibiotics needs to be started in hospital and then continued when you go home, for a total of at least three months.

The most common symptoms include fever, cough with mucus and difficulty breathing. Other symptoms include skin sores that don't heal or, for men, pain or difficulty when trying to pass water. If you are sick with any of these symptoms, you should go to a health clinic and see a doctor. By avoiding contact with the germs you can reduce your risk. When it is rainy and windy, stay inside. If you go outside, wear shoes. When gardening, protect your hands by wearing gloves.

**When you cannot get a compliment in any other way,
pay yourself one.**

Mark Twain

**The Arthritis
Foundation of the
Northern Territory Inc.**
Trading as
**Arthritis &
Osteoporosis NT**
ABN 67 099 326 608

Patron:

Her Honour the Honourable
Vicki O'Halloran AM
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What We Do

Our work includes:

- Responding to walk in, email and telephone enquiries
- Providing personalised information packs in response to enquiries
- Producing this newsletter six times each year
- Hosting pain self-management courses for consumers - call the office on 8948 5232 for more details of the next available course
- Providing information stands at a range of forums throughout the year
- Keeping in touch with other community health organisations and the services they provide
- Delivering bulk materials on request to a range of health services
- Presentations to community groups by invitation
- Making applications for various small grants to assist with special projects
- Liaising with Arthritis Australia and other state and territory arthritis organisations
- Liaising with Healthy Bones Australia.



 **THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY**

Are you interested in how an
online treatment could help
you cope better with your
rheumatoid arthritis?

Researchers at the University of Sydney and Macquarie University are conducting a trial looking at the effectiveness of two evidence-based interventions for people with rheumatoid arthritis.

ra.online@sydney.edu.au
The University of Sydney
HREC approval: 2021/516

These interventions are completely online and run for 8 weeks. Participation will involve filling out several online questionnaires and participating in a short phone interview. If you are interested in finding out more information, scan the QR code or go to:
<https://bit.ly/3Fb1Fu4>



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