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## Arthritis & Osteoporosis NT

August 2020

### Arthritis Australia

As the national peak arthritis consumer body, Arthritis Australia works in collaboration with arthritis organisations in ACT, New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia. Their website has many helpful articles and links.

### Inside:

- P.2 & 3 Reducing opioid harm
- P 3 Recipe — grilled salmon
- P 4 What We Do Helping You Take Charge of Pain

### Membership

Thank you to all loyal & supportive members who have already renewed their annual memberships.

## MyRA website and COVID-19

### — radio awareness campaign

In our June 2020 Special Edition #3 newsletter we told you about the new MyRA website, for Rheumatoid Arthritis support, set up by Arthritis Australia. Since then, with some financial assistance from Arthritis Australia, we have collaborated in a nationwide radio awareness campaign.

As well advertising the MyRA website, the campaign included advertisements regarding the importance of continuing to take medication for autoimmune forms of arthritis during the COVID-19 pandemic. This advice was also included in the March-April 2020 Special Edition #1.

Arthritis Australia provided five different recordings (both 15 and 30 second versions) which were sent to three different radio networks in the NT. They were broadcast variously from 17th June to 18th July.

## Short term Board vacancy

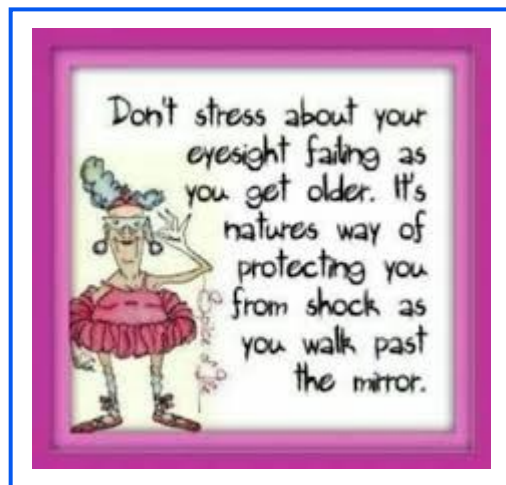
### *A golden opportunity to see if board membership suits you!*

All Board positions become vacant at the AGM. Date to be advised, but no later than mid-November, so only three or four meetings to attend.

We have several unfilled positions for non-executive board members, and our Vice-President, Carol Francis, has resigned to relocate interstate.

**Are you, or someone you know, prepared to give it a go?**

**We look forward to hearing from you!**



## *Reducing opioid harm through regulatory changes*

### **Information for consumers, patients and carers**

The Australian Government is implementing a number of regulatory changes in order to minimise the harms caused by opioid prescription medicines to Australians each year. The changes will ensure the safe and effective prescribing and use of opioids while maintaining access for patients who need them.

### **Why the changes are being made**

Over the past decade, Australians have experienced a significant increase in the level of harm and deaths arising from the use of pharmaceutical opioids. Every day in Australia, nearly 150 hospitalisations and 14 emergency department admissions involve issues relating to opioid use, and three people die from the harm that results.

Opioids can be an effective component of the management of short-term and cancer-related pain. However, the evidence shows that for most people with long-term non-cancer pain, opioids do not provide improvement in pain or function compared with other treatments. Instead, they carry significant risk of harm, even when used as directed.

The regulatory changes aim to reduce the harm from opioids by reducing the number of people who start opioid treatment for short-term pain, for example following injury or surgery, and then continue to use the medicine long-term where the risk of harm outweighs benefit. This will allow doctors to implement best-practice opioid prescribing for people living with pain while ensuring adequate pain management.

For people who are gaining little benefit from opioids or who are experiencing harm, doctors will be encouraged to work in partnership with their patients to safely either stop the opioid medicine or ensure the best dose is found that effectively treats their pain while minimising the risk of side effects.

Many people who reduce or stop their use of opioids find that their lives improve. They can think more clearly and are more alert. Some people find their mobility is better and they are steadier on their feet.

### **What changes are being made**

The regulatory changes will require:

- smaller pack sizes for immediate-release opioids for short-term pain relief, for example after injury or surgery (the existing larger pack sizes will still be available for those who need them)
- add additional warning statements to the approved Product Information
- improve the information available to prescribers and consumers to encourage best-practice prescribing and to be better informed about the potential risks with opioid use and how to minimise them
- ensure patients are prescribed an opioid only where the benefits outweigh the risks.

### **Products affected by the regulatory changes**

Prescription opioid products that are affected by the regulatory changes include:

- |              |                 |              |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| • tramadol   | • buprenorphine | • oxycodone  |
| • tapentadol | • hydromorphone | • fentanyl   |
| • codeine    | • morphine      | • methadone. |

### **When the changes take effect**

The regulatory changes have already commenced and will be further phased in during 2020, with some updating of Product Information documents that health professionals use.

### **Will I still be able to get prescription opioids?**

If you require opioid treatment for a long period of time, for example if you have cancer or are receiving palliative care, you will continue to receive the same opioid medications in the same way, with the same pack sizes as you do now.

If you require opioids for short-term pain relief, you will likely receive your medication in smaller pack sizes to reduce the amount of opioids left over when you no longer need them. It is not uncommon for people to believe they must continue to take all of the medication in the package, even if they no longer need it.

## Will my doctor be prevented from prescribing an opioid for my long-term non-cancer pain?

Your doctors and other prescribers will still be able to prescribe opioids if it is considered clinically effective. However, the changes will prompt doctors to consider whether prescribing an opioid is likely to give you greater benefit than the potential risks or whether there may be other treatment options for you.

In some conditions, non-opioid medications such as paracetamol or ibuprofen along with other types of treatment not involving medications, may provide similar pain relief as taking an opioid, without the same risk of harm.

Ideally, the best alternative for a person living with long-term non-cancer pain is to enrol in a pain management program. This will explore tailored treatment that best meets the needs of each individual. Such treatment can bring in additional options that do not involve medications, including activities such as graded exercise, mindfulness, yoga, etc.

## Should I stop taking my opioids immediately?

No. If you have been taking an opioid for some time you should continue to take it, but you should talk to your treating health professionals about whether the treatment remains the best for you. Stopping opioids suddenly can lead to withdrawal symptoms, so changes to the amount you take should be made with the support of a health professional such as a doctor, nurse practitioner or pharmacist.

If you have any questions about your treatment always discuss these with a health professional.

## What should I do with prescription opioids that I don't need anymore?

If you have opioids you no longer need, they should be returned to your local pharmacy. The TGA website has more information at: [www.tga.gov.au/safe-disposal-unwanted-medicines](http://www.tga.gov.au/safe-disposal-unwanted-medicines).

## Where can I access further information about prescription opioids?

Talk to your doctor, nurse practitioner or pharmacist.

You can also go to:

- TGA website at: [www.tga.gov.au/alert/prescription-opioids-hub](http://www.tga.gov.au/alert/prescription-opioids-hub).
- NPS MedicineWise website at: <https://www.nps.org.au/consumers/opioid-medicines>.
- [www.painaustralia.org.au](http://www.painaustralia.org.au) whose aim is to “make pain a national health priority and ensure equitable access to effective pain services for all Australians “

## *Grilled salmon with warm peas, asparagus & cannellini beans*

### Ingredients

- 4 x 120g skinless salmon fillets
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 200g sugar snap peas, halved
- 1 cup frozen green peas
- 2 large bunches asparagus, sliced diagonally
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 1 tablespoon baby capers, rinsed, drained, chopped
- 1 x 400g can no-added salt cannellini beans, rinsed, drained
- ¼ cup reduced-salt
- chicken stock
- ¼ cup flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tablespoons sliced Kalamata olives
- Lemon wedges, to serve



### Instructions

- 1 Heat a barbecue hotplate or chargrill pan at high heat. Spray salmon with olive oil. Season with cracked black pepper and cook for 2–3 minutes each side.
- 2 Meanwhile, heat olive oil in a large non-stick frying pan over high heat. Add the greens. Cook, stirring, for 2–3 minutes. Add the garlic, capers and the cannellini beans and cook veg, stirring, for 1 minute. Add stock and simmer for 1–2 minutes, or until the beans are heated through and veg are just tender. Stir through parsley and sliced olives.
- 3 Serve salmon and vegies with lemon wedges on the side.

**The Arthritis  
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Northern Territory Inc.**  
Trading as  
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Osteoporosis NT**  
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Margaret Murray  
Anne Coutts  
Charles Atherton

## What We Do

### Our work includes:

- Responding to walk in, email and telephone enquiries
- Providing personalised information packs in response to enquiries
- Producing our publication, *joinTed*, four times a 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 to both the private and public hospitals in Darwin and Palmerston as well as to a range of health service providers
- Community presentations
- Making applications for various small grants to assist with special projects
- Liaising with Arthritis Australia and other state and territory arthritis organisations
- Liaising with Osteoporosis Australia



## Helping You

Support groups are opportunities for members with common interests and experiences to meet informally over a cup of tea or coffee, to chat, share news and ideas etc. Good company in a relaxed setting means feeling better when you leave than when you arrived!

### Palmerston Support Group meets monthly:

- at the Brennan Electorate Office, Palmerston Shopping Centre (opposite Target)
- on the third Monday of each month at 10.00 am

## Take Charge of Pain

When: Wednesday 12 and 19 August  
10.00 am to 12.30 pm

Where: Wanguri Electorate Office, Hibiscus Shopping Centre

Cost: \$5 per session, Seniors Month rate

### Places are filling fast, so register your interest today!

- Learn strategies to help you cope with chronic pain
- Take more control over your life
- improve your health and well-being

**Bookings Essential: Ph 89485232**



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