

Providing

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

Promoting

healthy lifestyles and self-management to optimise health outcomes.

Inside:

P 2:

- Update on NTScript

P 3:

- Coming soon

(1) Seniors expo

(2) Pain Management course

- Palmerston Support Group
- Membership

P 4

- Board update
- World Scleroderma Day

P 5

- Out and about
- Moving to music

P 6 & 7

- Latest advice from ARA re COVID vaccinations

P 8

- What We Do

joinNTed

Arthritis & Osteoporosis NT

June 2021

Exercise - why bother?

"Oh yes, this program keeps my knees moving. The surgeon said the reason I am doing so well after my knee replacement is because I was doing these exercises and keeping fit and strong" *Annie*



"My Physiotherapist said these exercise are spot on for my hip and I think the stretching is really helping to keep me moving. I feel stronger and more confident after my recent fall" *Pat*

"I had my first day at work with no pain. It has been amazing how much the exercises have helped with my ankle injury and overall strength" *Julie*



"I found the strengthening and stretching has really helped with my hip pain, I am really hopeful I will now be able to get back to my walking netball" *Sue*

"I have some very serious back issues and having the girls help me do the stretches and exercises properly has made a huge difference. I can move around the house more easily now and I am sleeping so much better." *Mary*

"I was having a lot of trouble getting up and down from the floor and it's so good to be able to practise this when there are people around to help" *Lyn*

These testimonials are from participants in The Joint Movement program in Alice Springs—after attending classes twice a week for just five weeks!

Call COTA NT 8941 1004 for classes available in Darwin suitable for the not so young.

Please note the above images are for inspiration only, and are not necessarily part of the exercises used!

Update on NTScript

NTHHealth is continuing to move towards joining other states and territories in implementing a prescription monitoring system to reduce the risk of unintentional overdoses with some medicines. “NTScript” is comprised of a new database for medicine regulators as well as a secure platform for your doctor and pharmacist to view the records of the prescriptions you have filled for some high risk medicines. The database has now been delivered and is already helping protect Territorians.

Legislation to mandate the use of the system as well as protect patient privacy is expected to be finalised before the end of 2021 and your doctor and pharmacist will be able to access the system soon after that.

Why do we need this?

Some people can develop dependence on medications used to treat pain, assist with sleep or manage anxiety. This can lead to high doses of these medicines being used which increases the risks of accidental overdose and even death.

Since the introduction of the same system in Victoria, there has been a 10% decrease in the number of fatal medicine overdoses.

Can someone opt out?

Like the current regulatory database, NTScript is not an opt out system. The law requires information on the supply of prescription medicines to be recorded by the prescriber and pharmacist and to be provided to regulators to help reduce the risk to Territorians. These same laws are being put in place in all States and Territories

How is privacy protected?

Data uploaded to NTScript is encrypted and stored in accordance with Commonwealth Department of Defence IT Standards. Access to NTScript is limited to only prescribers, pharmacists and regulators. Privacy is protected under Northern Territory and Commonwealth law and doctors and pharmacists can only access information for the patients they are directly looking after.

Is this the same as My Health Record?

No, they are different systems.

My Health Record is a patient controlled summary that helps you discuss your care with your health professionals.

NTScript is focused on providing data to meet legal obligations around medicines that are known to have increased risks of accidental overdose.

Article by Sam Keitaanpaa, NTScript Project Officer, Department of Health

Coming soon

1. Seniors Expo - Friday 9th July

CDU Stadium at the Marrara sports complex.

Celebrating Territorians' resilience, strength and unity, this year's Expo shines a spotlight on multicultural diversity.

2. Pain management course "Take Charge of Pain"

Taking charge of pain means gaining more control over your life!

These interactive workshops are relevant to anyone experiencing chronic pain, whatever the cause.

Where: **In Leanyer**

When: Tuesday 20th and 27th July

Time: 10:00am to 12:30pm

Bookings essential - 8948 5232



Palmerston Support Group

Celebrating Mothers Day, the group enjoyed a high tea at their May meeting, thoughtfully organised by convenor Anne.



The group meets on the third Monday each month at 10:00am in the meeting room of the Brennan Electorate office opposite Target. As well as special events like this one, there is a guest speaker for most meetings.

For more information contact the office on 8948 5232

Membership:

Welcome to new members.

For current members, renewals fall due on 1st July and personalized renewal notices will be sent out with the next newsletter. Please note that membership fees have remained the same for 12 years.

This income is a valuable contribution to our sustainability. Thank you for your support!



Board Update—Position of President still vacant

As well as several unfilled vacancies of ordinary board members, the position of President remains vacant. Once again, the Board appeals to you, our members, to consider becoming involved as a Board member, not necessarily President. All Board Members regardless of their experience make a valuable contribution. All positions fall vacant at the next AGM, so now is an opportunity for a trial run of attending just five monthly board meetings before then.

29th June World Scleroderma Day -

Shine a light on scleroderma this June

The Northern Territory will shine bright like a sunflower in June as part of a month-long commitment by Scleroderma Australia to boost awareness, engage community support and raise vital research funds for the nearly 6,000 Australians experiencing scleroderma – a little-known chronic and often life-threatening condition of the body's connective tissue.



About scleroderma

Scleroderma, or systemic sclerosis, is a chronic condition of the body's connective tissue. Generally classified as one of the autoimmune rheumatic conditions, it can cause thickening and hardening of bodily tissues, and often causes serious, life-threatening damage to the lungs, heart, kidneys, oesophagus, and gastrointestinal tract. Women are three to four times more likely to develop the condition than men. And although the condition can present at any age, the onset is more common between the ages of 25 and 55.

About Scleroderma Australia

Incorporated in 2005, Scleroderma Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that facilitates a national representative voice to support the scleroderma community. This is achieved by raising awareness of scleroderma, expanding community engagement, advocacy and support for people living with scleroderma, and raising vital funds to continue ground-breaking research into the condition.

Article provided by Scleroderma Australia

Out and about

150th anniversary of Government House

Her Honour the Honourable Vicki O'Halloran AM Administrator of the NT is our Patron.

On behalf of AONT Ruth was pleased to accept the invitation to a 150th Anniversary function. Her Honour addressed the guests, outlining some of the history of the House, including the contributions made over many years by various Administrators and their families. As well as making it a family home, these contributions and donations have enhanced the formal function of Government House.



"Healthy Bones"

This is our stall at the Darwin High School Healthy Living Expo. There is no better opportunity to spread the message that the teenage years are the time to lay down the best foundation for strong bones for life:

- Regular weight bearing exercise
- Good calcium intake (dairy foods are the simplest way for most of us)
- Vitamin D to assist calcium absorption (a little bit of sunshine every day)



Moving to music

Looking for a fun and safe way to move? The Grey Panthers dancing troupe for the over 60s, a part of Tracks Dance, is a prime example of dance as a whole of life activity. Classes are held in both Darwin and Coomalie regions. All you need to do is be over 60 years young. Darwin classes are held each Friday morning at the Tracks Studio. Call 89 411 410 for more information.

Look out for the Grey Panthers at the Seniors Expo on 9th July, CDU Stadium, Marrara.

ARA COVID-19 Vaccination for People with autoimmune inflammatory rheumatic diseases (AIRD) 22 April 2021

Why is it important for me to have the vaccine? Some diseases (including rheumatoid arthritis) are caused by the body's immune system, which usually protects us from infection. When the immune system is affected by arthritis or drugs to treat the condition, the risk from COVID-19 may be increased. **If you get vaccinated, you will be less likely to get COVID-19. Even if you are infected, it is more likely to be a milder illness.** People who catch COVID-19 can become very unwell.

What vaccination will be available? Two COVID-19 vaccines are currently available in Australia – the AstraZeneca (Oxford) vaccine and the Pfizer (Comirnaty) vaccine. **Both are suitable for rheumatology patients whose immune system may not be strong.** The AstraZeneca vaccine is a viral vector vaccine. The Pfizer vaccine uses messenger RNA (mRNA).

The COVID-19 vaccines which will be available in Australia later in 2021 are safe for people with arthritis and people taking drugs that suppress the immune system, even if the condition is active. This is because none of these is a “live” vaccine.

On April 8th the national vaccine rollout changed to recommend the use of the Pfizer vaccine over the AstraZeneca vaccine in adults aged under 50 years who have not already received a first dose of AstraZeneca vaccine.

The AstraZeneca vaccine can be used in adults aged under 50 years where the benefits are likely to outweigh the risks for that individual and the person has made an informed decision based on an understanding of the risks and benefits.

People who have had their first dose of the COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccine without any serious adverse events can safely be given their second dose. This includes adults under the age of 50. People who have had blood clots associated with low platelet levels after their first dose of COVID-19 AstraZeneca should not be given the second dose.

People over the age of 50 can receive either vaccine as the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine continue to outweigh the risk of adverse effects in this age group.

Need for a second dose. The AstraZeneca vaccine will require a second dose, usually 12 weeks after the first dose. The Pfizer vaccine will require a second dose, usually 21 days after the first dose. The first dose does provide some protection. The second dose gives more long-term protection from COVID-19.

Will the drugs that I take for my condition affect the way the vaccine works?

Some people who are taking drugs that suppress the immune system may be given advice to continue avoiding exposure to COVID-19 after they have had the vaccination. This is because their medications could mean their immune system doesn't respond as strongly to the vaccine as people who don't take these drugs.

This does not mean you should stop your treatment, because this can result in a flare of your condition which puts you at greater risk from COVID-19.

Everyone in Australia will need to follow Government advice on reducing the spread of COVID-19, even after they have had the vaccine.

Can I have other vaccinations (e.g. influenza vaccine) at the same time as the COVID-19 vaccination?

The administration of any other vaccination on the same day as the COVID-19 vaccine is not recommended. The preferred minimal interval between another vaccination and the COVID-19 vaccine is 14 days. You do not need to delay your influenza vaccine until you complete the course of two COVID-19 vaccines.

Should I delay my rituximab treatment so that I can have the COVID-19 vaccination? To ensure the best response to the COVID-19 vaccination, it is recommended that vaccination is performed towards the end of a rituximab dosing cycle or before initiation of rituximab therapy. Please discuss the timing with your rheumatologist.

Should I continue to take methotrexate when I have the COVID-19 vaccination? There is some evidence that responses to the COVID-19 vaccine are reduced in people treated with methotrexate. Therefore, interruption of methotrexate therapy during COVID-19 vaccination may be considered, but only in patients with stable rheumatic disease at low risk of flare, or those for whom protection from COVID-19 is of particular importance. **This decision to hold methotrexate for one or two doses following each vaccination should be individualised and discussed with your treating Rheumatologist.**

What about other disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)?

Currently there is very little evidence that other DMARDs reduce protection from the vaccine. Continuing DMARDs will often be the safest option to prevent disease flares.

For more information on the use of rituximab, methotrexate and other DMARDs with the COVID19 vaccine please go to the practical information section of the draft Australian Living Guidelines

<https://app.magicapp.org/#/guideline/LqRV3n/rec/EZ6z8E>

Are there any side effects? Some people will get mild side effects. These can include pain where the injection goes in, tiredness, headache and aching of muscles. Serious reactions like allergic reactions are extremely rare. People with a history of severe allergic reactions can be vaccinated but should be monitored for 30 minutes after receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine.

In the 2 weeks after your vaccine if you have severe, persistent headaches that are different from "usual" and do not settle with paracetamol or other painkillers seek medical advice as soon as possible.

What about reports of blood clots with the AstraZeneca vaccine? The benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine for those over 50 continue to outweigh the risk of side effects. More information can be found here: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/atagi-statement-on-astrazeneca-vaccine-inresponse-to-new-vaccine-safety-concerns>.

Do you still need to have the vaccine if you have had COVID-19? It is possible for people who have already had COVID-19 to have the vaccine for it. It is not known yet how long the antibodies made by your body in response to COVID-19 last, so a vaccine could offer more protection or boost any antibodies your body has already made.

An Australian Government COVID vaccine fact checker is available at; <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/is-it-true>

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

Patron:

Her Honour the Honourable
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What We Do

Our work includes:

- Responding to walk in, email and telephone enquiries with tailored information packs
- Producing this newsletter up to six times each year
- Conducting pain management courses for consumers – relevant to anyone experiencing chronic pain, whatever the cause
- Providing information stands at a range of forums throughout the year, to showcase and share our resources
- Keeping in touch with other community health organisations and the services they provide
- Delivering bulk materials to various providers on request
- Giving presentations on pre-arranged topics to community groups
- Collaborating with Arthritis Australia on various national projects to contribute towards better outcomes for those with arthritis.
- Sourcing the latest information from our national bodies, Arthritis Australia and Healthy Bones Australia, so we can provide reliable and up to date material to clients.

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