The prevalence of arthritis is higher among veterans and active military personnel

Arthritis is a term used to describe over 100 chronic diseases and conditions that affect the joints, surrounding tissues, and other connective tissues. Symptoms include stiffness in the joints, pain, and swelling, and may affect a person’s overall quality of life. Specifically, research has shown that arthritis can have an impact on a persons’ ability to perform their work.\(^1\) Chronic conditions like obesity have been described as affecting military readiness and one in three people considered obese have arthritis.\(^2,3\)

Studies have found that the prevalence of arthritis among veterans and active military personnel is higher than in the general adult population.\(^4,5\) In New York State, one in three veterans and active military personnel have doctor-diagnosed arthritis compared to one in four adults in the non-military population (Figure 1). The prevalence of arthritis increases with age. Adults 65 years and older are more than three times as likely to have arthritis than adults between 18-64 years old.\(^6\)

In the 65 years and older age group, the proportion of individuals with arthritis is similar comparing military personnel and non-military personnel. However, in the 18 - 64 years age group, the proportion of individuals with arthritis varies, with a higher prevalence among military personnel (Figure 2).

**Figure 1: Percentage of arthritis among military and non-military, NYS adults**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Military Personnel</th>
<th>Non-Military</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 - 64 years</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2: Percentage of arthritis by age group among military and non-military, NYS adults**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Military Personnel</th>
<th>Non-Military</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 - 64 years</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and older</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2016; Note: Military personnel includes respondents who have ever served on active duty in the United States Armed Forces, either in the regular military or in a National Guard or military reserve unit.

**Public Health Opportunity**

The higher prevalence of arthritis among military personnel and their age distribution requires interventions targeting this specific population. Promoting participation in arthritis education programs can reduce the impact arthritis and its symptoms may have on military personnel.

**Contact**

For more information about the data included and their specific implications for action, please send an e-mail to DCDIF@health.ny.gov with IFA # 2018-02 in the subject line.

To access a list of Healthy Lifestyle Workshops visit: [https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/conditions/arthritis/programs](https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/conditions/arthritis/programs)

To access other Information for Action reports, visit the NYSDOH public website: [https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/prevention/injury_prevention/information_for_action](https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/prevention/injury_prevention/information_for_action)

---


\(^3\) Kelli LD, Golightly, YM, Jackson, GL. The Journal of Rheumatology February 2006, 33 (2) 348-354.


\(^5\) Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2016