

# A Call to Action for **Military Veterans**

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a complex musculoskeletal disorder that often affects weight bearing joints (hips, knees, and spine) and hands, although it can be found in other joints, too. Of the more than 100 types of arthritis, OA is the most common form of arthritis, affecting 1 in 7 US adults — 32.5 million people. Further, OA affects more than 1 in 3 Americans who have served in the military and is the only chronic condition more common among veterans than civilians. It is the 2nd leading cause of military discharge, behind combat wounds, and is a leading cause of pain and disability.

To learn more about strategies for managing joint pain and related symptoms, check out [Remain in the Game for Tactical Athletes](#).

**OA** | OSTEOARTHRITIS  
ACTION ALLIANCE

 **Arthritis Foundation**

 ALLIANCE FOR  
Balanced Pain  
Management

The pain, stiffness and swelling from OA can limit function and mobility and reduce quality of life. These symptoms may make it harder to perform daily and work routines such as standing or sitting for long periods, bending and walking, going up and down stairs, writing or typing, or even holding a cup.

Major injuries, like a torn anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) or meniscus, significantly increase the risk of OA in the knee joint. Joint injuries, and overall joint overloading, are common in the military because of the high physical demands of combat and fitness training required for the job.

## WHY OA MATTERS

- OA places a major burden on military service members and veterans. **Injuries and subsequent OA lead to high rates of disability.** They significantly impact force readiness and quality of life for a large proportion of service members and veterans.

- **Service members with knee injuries are nearly 6 times more likely to be diagnosed with knee OA** during their military career.

- Soldiers with post-traumatic knee OA (OA that develops after an injury) are **31% more likely to receive a disability discharge at a younger age** when compared to those with knee OA that developed over time from increased joint loading and repetitive motion.

- After returning to civilian life, **veterans over the age of 40 are twice as likely to develop arthritis.** Joint pain increases the risk of depression, anxiety, and social isolation.



- About **half of veterans with arthritis report limitations in their daily activities** because of joint symptoms. Less activity is a major barrier to managing other common health conditions, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

- **Opioids and benzodiazepines are prescribed for 27% of people with OA**, despite the high risk of adverse side effects and drug addiction, and a lack of evidence supporting the effectiveness of this approach.

## ACT NOW!

OA cannot be cured currently — but several actions have been proven to help manage OA and improve quality of life.



**1 Be physically active.** Physical activity may help improve pain, mood, and your ability to do everyday activities. It may also help you manage your weight.



[Arthritis-friendly physical activity programs:](#) Links to community-based, structured physical activity programs that have been proven to reduce arthritis symptoms and teach you how to safely increase your physical activity to manage arthritis and other chronic conditions.



[How to Start an Exercise Program:](#) Tools to safely start a workout or exercise routine and stick with it.

**2 Maintain a healthy weight.** Extra weight increases joint pain and damages cartilage of the joints, especially in the hips and knees. Even small amounts of weight loss may help relieve pain. Every 1 pound of weight loss gives you 4 pounds of relief on your knees.



[The Weight & OA Connection:](#) Tips to get you started on losing weight gradually and steadily; for example, make small changes, one pound at a time; limit sugary drinks such as soda and juices and replace them with water; add a vegetable and/or fruit to your meals, and sit less, move more!



[Healthy Eating for a Healthy Weight:](#) Tips to get started identifying and including a variety of foods in a healthy eating plan that helps manage your weight.



[MOVE! Weight Management Program:](#) Up-to-date approaches to weight management and health promotion specifically designed to improve the lives of veterans.

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**Manage your pain** using non-pharmacologic or pharmacologic (medications) options.



**Recommended treatments:** A table showing many options for managing OA pain – at-home treatments, support from a professional, medication, and surgery.



**Osteoarthritis:** Ways to manage OA to minimize pain, continue physical activities, maintain a good quality of life and remain mobile.

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**Develop self-care skills** for balancing the demands of your OA symptoms, conditions, healthcare providers, and treatments. It can all become very overwhelming. Feel better by learning skills that will help improve your quality of life.



**Chronic Disease Self-Management Program:** Small group workshop, led by trained leaders, one 2 ½ hour session once a week for 6 weeks. Participants make weekly action plans, share experiences, and help each other solve problems they encounter in creating and carrying out their self-management program. Also available in Spanish, [Tomando Control de su Salud](#).



**Toolkit for Active Living with Chronic Conditions:** Self-management program that can be completed by mail individually at your own pace, available in English and Spanish.



**Better Choices, Better Health:** Self-paced online group workshop that uses content from the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program.



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**Connect to others** who share similar life experiences to help you feel like you are not alone. Some of these group programs may help, or you can get involved in online social or support groups.



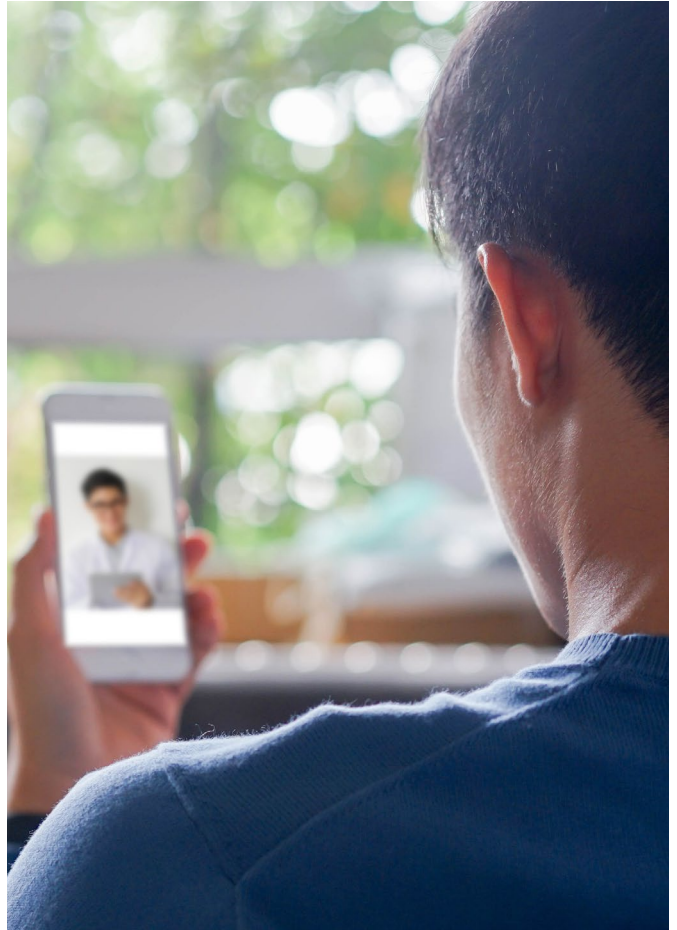
[Arthritis Foundation virtual Live Yes! Connect Groups](#), Facebook groups such as the [StandUP2OA](#), hosted by the OA Action Alliance, and [Arthritis Together](#).



[Arthritis and the Military](#): Information, tips and resources that can help active-duty and veteran service members take control of arthritis symptoms and challenges.



[Telephone Lifestyle Coaching \(TLC\) Program](#): Telephone-based coaching program for veterans to talk with a health coach about personal health and self-care behaviors, and receive education and support for goal setting and action planning to improve their health and well-being.



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**Prevent future injuries** by taking actions to prevent falls and maintaining or increasing your strength and flexibility.



[Injury prevention resources](#): Handouts, resources, and links to evidence-based information about injury prevention for athletes and adults actively engaged in sports.



[Remain in the Game](#): Routines and exercises to add strength and flexibility training to every workout.



[Fall prevention resources](#): Tips for exercises that can help prevent falls, which are more common in adults ages 45 and older.

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