

Release: Immediate, March 22, 2016

### **Risk of Work Time Loss Almost Double for Osteoarthritis Sufferers**

Osteoarthritis (OA) sufferers have almost twice the risk of losing work time due to illness or disability as those without OA and are three times as likely to become unemployed, a research team from the University of Calgary and Statistics Canada has found. The study's results raise alarms over the lack of work loss prevention programs for people with OA – the fastest growing cause of disability worldwide. The results are published in [Rheumatology](#).

Combing the National Population Health Survey, the researchers selected 659 people with OA, matched them with 2,144 non-OA individuals on the basis of age and sex, and compared their reported work time loss from 2000 to 2010. Work time loss was 90% higher and unemployment tripled due to illness or disability among the OA sufferers after adjusting for sociodemographic, health and work-related status.

OA is a leading cause of chronic pain and loss of mobility in Canada and is associated strongly with diminished productivity and increased utilization of health care resources. Disease onset usually occurs during the working years.

“The association between OA and work loss is a relatively new area of research,” Behnam Sharif, the lead researcher and a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Calgary, said.

“Work time loss will become an increasingly important problem among employed populations in western countries, including Canada, for several reasons,” Dr. Sharif said. “First, the prevalence of OA is growing due to aging populations and increasing obesity rates. In addition, decades of low birth rates mean western countries are facing the prospect of having to keep older people in the workforce.”

Dr. Sharif said work time loss was 25% higher among men than among women with OA. “This may reflect a higher rate of physically demanding jobs among males,” he said.

Researcher Deborah Marshall said the study found lower income earners were more likely to stop working. “This may suggest poorer support for lower income groups in terms of illness and disability.” Dr. Marshall is a professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences, University of Calgary, and director of Health Technology Assessment and Research for Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute (ABJHI).

She said there is a paucity of OA research literature on work time loss prevention programs. “Identifying those who are at higher risk of work time loss due to OA is an important first step in developing these programs.”

“Within a generation, there will be a new diagnosis of OA every 60 seconds in Canada,” ABJHI’s Chief Operating Officer, Christopher Smith, said. “We need to intensify efforts in prevention and care in response to the growing burden of this disease on individuals, public health care and the economy.”

“Being unable to work due to arthritis places a terrible strain on a person, and on their family and the community,” said Janet Yale, president and CEO of The Arthritis Society. “There is a lot that employers and employees can do to help reduce the risk of developing OA, and help those living with OA to remain productive, and it starts with getting educated about the disease.”

**Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute** is Canada’s only independent institute for channeling knowledge into better bone and joint health care services and the nation’s leading organization for

engaging stakeholders in adopting best practices. ABJHI is a not-for-profit institute and a registered charity. For more information and to make a donation, visit [www.abjhi.com](http://www.abjhi.com).

**The Arthritis Alliance of Canada** is a coalition of over 35 organizations representing patient groups, arthritis consumer organizations, professional organizations, not-for-profits, government, industry and researchers. The Alliance's goal is to improve the lives of Canadians with arthritis. While each member organization continues its own work, the Alliance provides a central focus for national arthritis-related initiatives. For more information, visit [www.arthritisalliance.ca](http://www.arthritisalliance.ca)

**The Arthritis Society** has been setting lives in motion for over 65 years. Dedicated to a vision of living well while creating a future without arthritis, The Society is Canada's principal health charity providing education, programs and support to the over 4.6 million Canadians living with arthritis. Since its founding in 1948, The Society has been the largest non-government funder of arthritis research in Canada, investing more than \$190 million in projects that have led to breakthroughs in the diagnosis, treatment and care of people with arthritis. The Arthritis Society is accredited under Imagine Canada's Standards Program. For more information and to make a donation, visit [www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca).

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