

# Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

September 2001

The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to ensure dignity and independence for Alaska's seniors and to assist them, through programs and services funded by the Commission, to lead useful and meaningful lives.



**Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger** is a monthly publication of the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA)

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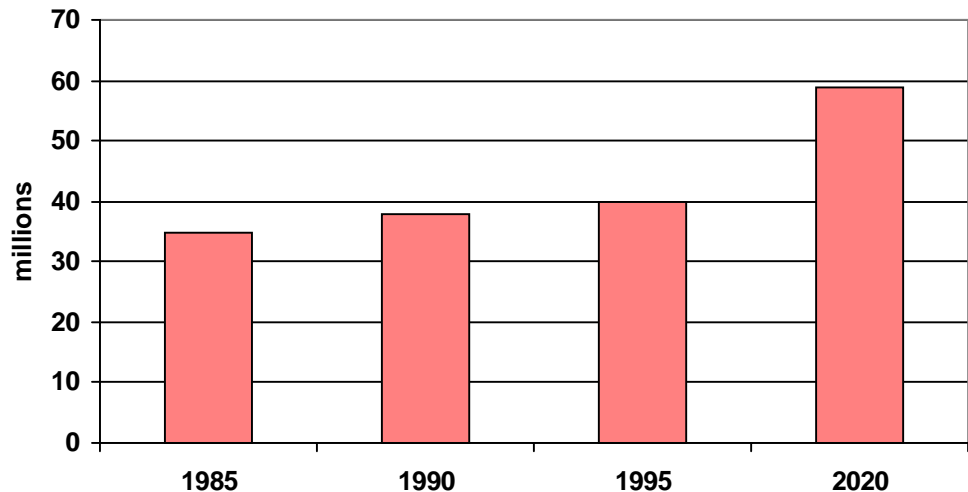
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## Past and Projected Numbers of Americans with Arthritis



Data and projections from The Centers for Disease Control, 1999.

## Arthritis May Affect Nearly 60 Million by 2020

Arthritis is the leading cause of disability in the United States. Contrary to popular perception, arthritis afflicts people of all ages, not just seniors. However, half of all Americans over the age of 65 have arthritis. Arthritis is not an inevitable consequence of aging, but as we age we should be aware of the symptoms of arthritis, and take early steps to treat it.

More than 100 diseases fall under the term arthritis, which literally means "joint inflammation." All are characterized by pain, stiffness, and swelling in joints, tendons, ligaments, muscles, and bones. Some can even affect internal organs. Arthritic pain is not always disabling, but it can lead to limited or reduced activity, which in turn can lead to diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. Frustration over limitations imposed by the condition can also lead to depression, stress, and lowered self-esteem.

Arthritis can be hereditary or caused by obesity or joint injury, such as from repetitive motion. It can also be contracted through bacterial or viral infections. The causes of many forms of arthritis are currently unknown.

Some of the more common types of arthritis are described below:

- **Osteoarthritis**, or degenerative joint disease, is the most common type of arthritis.

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## Arthritis (continued from page 1)

It primarily affects cartilage, that cushions bone ends within the joint, causing it to fray, wear, and decay. In severe cases, cartilage may wear away entirely, leaving a bone-on-bone joint.

- **Rheumatoid arthritis** is an inflammatory disease of the joint lining, causing pain, stiffness, swelling, deformity and loss of function. Inflammation most often affects joints of the hands and feet and tends to be symmetrical (meaning that you get it on both sides of the body).
- **Fibromyalgia** is a chronic disorder that causes pain and stiffness throughout the muscles and tendons. Pain and localized tender points occur commonly in the neck, spine, shoulders, and hips causing widespread pain, fatigue and lack of sleep.
- **Gout** results from deposits of sharp uric acid crystals in the connective tissue, joint spaces, or both. Uric acid normally passes through the kidneys and is eliminated in urine. If the concentration of uric acid in the blood rises above normal levels, crystals may form in the joints. Gout most commonly affects the big toe.
- **Bursitis** inflames the bursae, the small, fluid-filled sacs that help lubricate movement between bones and other structures in the joints, causing pain and tenderness that may limit the movement of nearby joints.
- **Tendinitis** (also spelled Tendonitis) refers to inflammation of tendons, the tough cords of tissue that connect muscle to bone. Tendinitis is caused by overuse, injury, or related rheumatic conditions.
- **Lupus, or systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE)** is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system harms the body's own healthy cells and tissues. Lupus can inflame and damage joints, skin, kidneys, heart, lungs, blood vessels and brain.

The arthritis descriptions above are from The National Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NAMISIC).

While figures on arthritis among Alaskans as a whole are incomplete, the incidence of arthritis is well documented among Alaskan Native groups. The Alaska Native Medical Center conducts biannual rheumatology clinics in 11 Alaskan communities, and maintains a database on arthritis. Studies published in the *Journal of Rheumatology* indicate that Tlingits have a higher rate of lupus than other Alaska Native groups. Tlingits and Inupiat have a higher incidence of rheumatoid arthritis than other groups.

Early diagnosis is the key to dealing with arthritis. Treatments have been developed for some forms of arthritis, and a variety of doctor-supervised exercise programs can strengthen arthritic joints, easing pain and possibly preventing or slowing damage. Proper diet and exercise can reduce body weight, which will help relieve pressure on arthritic joints.

The Arthritis Foundation, Washington/Alaska Chapter, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials have developed a public health approach to arthritis. The Alaska Arthritis Program, housed in the Department of Health and Social Services, is one result of this collaboration. The program receives direction and support from the Alaska Arthritis Advisory Group. This group (of which the Alaska Commission on Aging is a member) has drafted the Alaska Arthritis and Osteoporosis Plan. The plan outlines strategies to improve the quality of life for Alaskans with arthritis and osteoporosis,

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## **Ketchikan Bookstore Owner Nominated for National Older Worker's Award**

Lillian Ference of Ketchikan has been nominated to receive the Green Thumb, Inc. Prime Time Award. Each state is invited to nominate one outstanding older worker for the award. The winner will be honored at an awards dinner on September 15th in Washington, D.C.

Ms. Ference owns and operates Parnassus, an independent bookstore in Ketchikan. She previously worked as a draftsman for Ryan Aeronautical, for Ellis Airlines, and as an employer representative with the Job Service for the State of Alaska. She was also a volunteer for the USO. Coworkers say Ms. Ference continues to spend seven days a week at her bookstore, visiting with customers. She has been described as a one-person social event.

Ms. Ference is described as having immense creativity and finely honed people skills. She has served as a mentor to many younger friends over the years.

### **Arthritis (continued from page 2)**

educate health providers about proper diagnosis and treatment, and increase Alaskans' awareness of arthritis and the resources available for dealing with it. The plan also includes gathering more comprehensive data on Alaskans affected by arthritis. The draft plan is available for review and comment on the Alaska Arthritis Program Web site: [www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/programs/chronic/arthritis/arthritis.shtml](http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/programs/chronic/arthritis/arthritis.shtml) (under the heading, "NEW!").

This month the Arthritis Foundation, Washington/Alaska Chapter is offering an arthritis training program to train healthcare professionals to teach arthritis and fibromyalgia self help courses to their patients. The workshop will be offered September 19-20 at the UAS-Sitka Campus, in conjunction with the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Care of the Elderly Conference, September 20-22 in Sitka. For more information please contact Teresa Bower, Director of Programs and Communications Arthritis foundation, WA/AK Chapter, 206-547-2707 x105 email: [TBower@arthritis.org](mailto:TBower@arthritis.org)

#### **Other arthritis information sites:**

Arthritis Foundation: [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)

Lupus Foundation of America, Alaska Chapter: [members.nbc.com/LFA\\_Alaska](http://members.nbc.com/LFA_Alaska)

### **Common Symptoms of Arthritis**

- Swelling in one or more joints
- Joint stiffness that lasts for an hour or more in the early morning
- Constant or recurring pain or tenderness in a joint
- Difficulty using or moving a joint normally
- Warmth and redness in a joint

