



# ARAD NEWSLETTER

Australian Rheumatology Association Database

In this issue of the Australian Rheumatology Association Database (ARAD) newsletter, we provide an update on the progress of the supplementary Joint Stiffness Survey, results from the Heart Health Survey, and an overview of a current research project investigating the use of complementary medicines.

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## JOINT STIFFNESS SURVEY

ARAD is working with an international group, OMERACT (Outcome Measures in Rheumatology) with the aim of including the patient's perspective on important outcomes in arthritis. Patients with arthritis say that joint stiffness is an important symptom but it is often not measured by rheumatologists or researchers.

We invited a selection of ARAD participants to complete a joint stiffness survey. Dr Rani Sinnathurai, Rheumatologist based at Royal North Shore Hospital has presented initial results at the OMERACT Conference and European League Against Rheumatism Conference in London, and will also present at the Australian Rheumatology Association Conference in Auckland. The results of this survey will be included in the next newsletter.

## HEART HEALTH SURVEY RESULTS

The risk of coronary artery disease in rheumatoid arthritis patients is 1.5 times greater than the general population. This is due to a combination of traditional risk factors, ongoing systemic inflammation and possibly treatments such as glucocorticoids.

Dr Alexandra Capon, researcher and rheumatology trainee based at Royal North Shore Hospital is currently investigating the link between cardiovascular risk factors and treatment in rheumatoid patients.

A Heart Survey was sent to all online rheumatoid patients in ARAD. Over 1,000 participants responded to the survey, with some of the key results below:

- Most people with high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes are receiving medications to treat these conditions.
- Less than half of the responders were physically active, doing less than 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week.
- Less than one-third who were overweight made any changes to their diet for their health.

In addition to helping with weight management, physical activity has many benefits for overall health and for arthritis; improving muscle strength, balance and joint mobility and flexibility. Many people said that their arthritis limits their physical activity, so it may be helpful to talk to your doctor or physiotherapist about ways to stay active whilst living with arthritis. Further information on exercise and healthy eating and arthritis is available on the Arthritis Australia website:

<http://www.arthritisaustralia.com.au/index.php/arthritis-information/information-sheets.html>

Your participation in these surveys is making a valuable contribution to our understanding in this area. Dr Alexandra Capon presented results from the Heart Health Survey at the Australian Rheumatology Association NSW Meeting and was awarded the prize for Best Registrar Presentation. Dr Rani Sinnathurai was awarded the Douglas Piper Award at the New Horizons Conference in Sydney.



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## COMPLEMENTARY MEDICATION USE

The World Health Organisation defines complementary medicines as a “broad set of health care practices that are not part of that country’s own tradition and are not fully integrated into the dominant health care system”.

With some reports indicating two out of three Australians using some form of complementary medication, ARAD researchers are investigating the usage patterns within ARAD participants. The information provided in your surveys will be used to investigate the use of complementary and herbal medications for the management of arthritis. Medical student, Han Goh, will be assisting with this analysis. Our findings will be communicated to you in subsequent newsletters.

Further information on complementary medications can be found at:

[http://www.nicm.edu.au/health\\_information/information\\_for\\_consumers/understanding\\_cm](http://www.nicm.edu.au/health_information/information_for_consumers/understanding_cm)

## ONLINE WEB-BASED QUESTIONNAIRE

Would you like to reduce the time it takes to do your questionnaire by 20 minutes? Do you have access to email? If the answer is yes to these questions, then why not join the other 2,200 ARAD participants and complete the questionnaire online. Simply email us at [arad@monash.edu](mailto:arad@monash.edu) with your preferred email address and we will email you the secure link.

As with the current paper version, all information provided to us via the online system will be confidential and the data will be securely stored and managed. In order to complete the questionnaire online, you will need Internet Explorer (Version 7 or higher), Firefox (version 2 or higher), or Safari.

For current online participants, thank you for providing feedback concerning the use of the online survey. We have recently upgraded the online system based on your feedback. Please do continue to provide your feedback for future system upgrades.

## PARTICIPATION IN ARAD

Participation in ARAD is voluntary which means that you are free to discontinue from the project at any time. If you wish to discontinue with the questionnaires, ARAD would still like to continue to use your information to monitor for any changes in your health statistics through linking to government registers of prescription medications, hospitalisations, cancers and deaths.

If you wish to discontinue completing the ARAD questionnaires and/or decline ARAD accessing your information, please write, fax, email or call to notify us of this on **ONE** of the following:

**Write to:**  
ARAD DMC  
DEPM  
Monash University  
Reply Paid 83087  
Melbourne VIC 3004

**Fax:** 1800 022 730  
**Email:** [arad@monash.edu](mailto:arad@monash.edu)

If you no longer wish to complete questionnaires for ARAD, ARAD thanks you for your participation so far. Should you wish to recommence, please contact [arad@monash.edu](mailto:arad@monash.edu) so ARAD can update your details and get you active in ARAD again!