

Arthritis and Risks Due to Social Isolation

April 2025

Arthritis, especially osteoarthritis, can increase a person's risk of becoming socially isolated due to pain, reduced mobility, and co-occurring conditions like anxiety and depression.¹ Social isolation (the lack of meaningful relationships, support networks or other social engagement) and loneliness are such profound threats to health and well-being that in 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General released an advisory calling attention to it as a public health crisis.² Living in rural areas, being 65 years old or older, or having a disability can all increase the risk of being socially isolated. The impact of these isolation risk factors on joint symptom severity for people with arthritis and their ability to work and engage in normal social activities are described below.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact ahs.vdhhdpanalytics@vermont.gov.

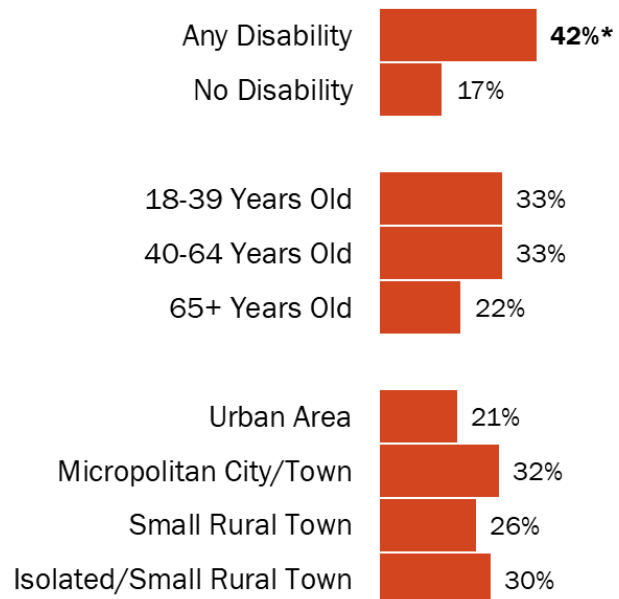
Key Points

- **Adults with arthritis who have a disability are 2-3 times more likely to have severe joint pain, as well as work and lifestyle limitations.**
- **The rate of arthritis-related severe joint pain, as well as work and lifestyle limitations increase with the number of risk factors for social isolation.**

Work Limitations

- Over a quarter (27%) of Vermont adults with arthritis report that their joint symptoms affect their ability to work or the type of work that they do.
- The rate of Vermont adults with arthritis reporting work limitations due to arthritis is significantly higher among adults with a disability compared to those who do not have disability. There are no statistically significant differences by geographic setting.
- Adults 40-64 years old are significantly more likely to report work limitations than those 65+. All other differences by age are not statistically significant.

Work limitations due to arthritis is twice as high among those with a disability.



*Denotes statistically significant difference within group. Source: BRFSS, 2021

~ See [notes](#) for the definitions used for disability and geographic settings.



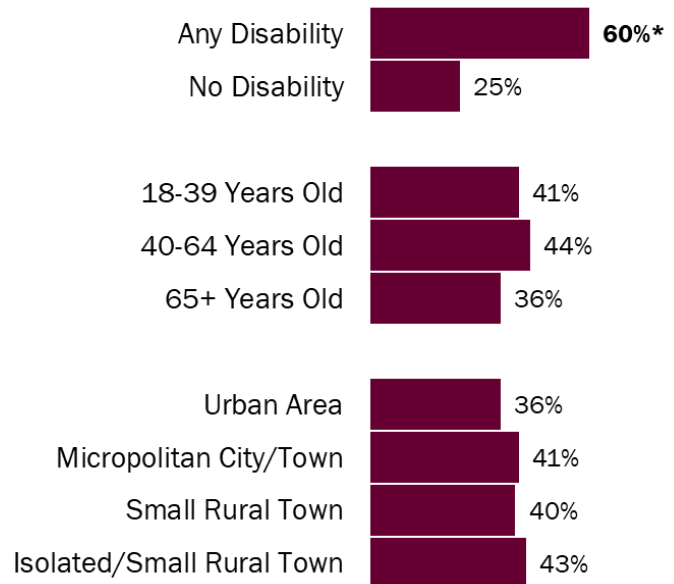
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802-863-7200



Lifestyle Limitations

- Two in five (41%) Vermont adults with arthritis report that their joint symptoms cause limitations in their lifestyle interfering with their normal social activities.
- The rate of Vermont adults with arthritis reporting their joint symptoms interfere with their normal social activities is significantly higher among adults with a disability compared to those without a disability. There are no statistically significant differences by age or geographic setting.

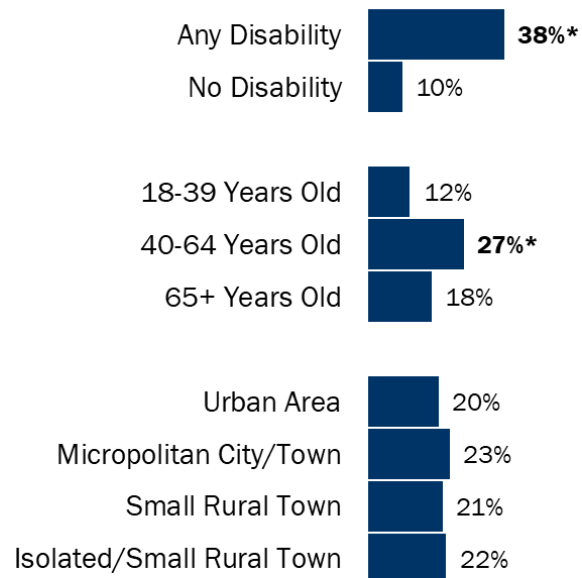
Lifestyle limitations due to arthritis is more than twice as high among adults with a disability.



Severe Joint Pain

- One in five (21%) Vermont adults with arthritis report that their joint pain is severe.
- The rate of Vermont adults with arthritis reporting severe joint pain is significantly higher among adults with a disability compared to those who do not have a disability, as well as adults 40-64 years old compared to all other age groups. There are no statistically significant differences by geographic setting.

Severe joint pain due to arthritis is over three times higher among adults with a disability.



*Denotes statistically significant difference within group.
Source: BRFSS, 2021

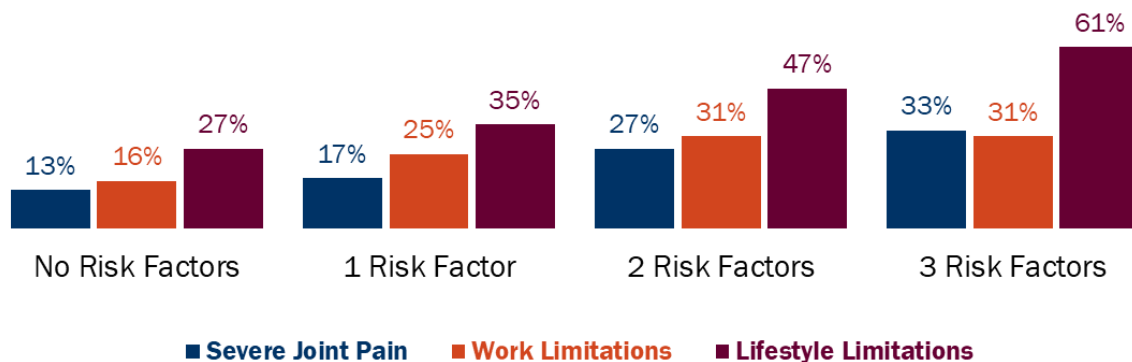
~ See [notes](#) for the definitions used for disability and geographic settings.

Increased Arthritis Risk from Social Isolation

Social isolation risk factors include having a disability, being 65 years or older or living in a small rural or isolated small rural town. As the number of risk factors increases the impact due to arthritis increases.

- The rate of severe joint pain more than doubles among those experiencing two or three risk factors compared to those with none. Adults with two or three risk factors have a significantly higher rate of severe joint pain than those with one or none.
- Those experiencing two or three risk factors have statistically higher rates of work and lifestyle limitations due to arthritis than those experiencing one or none. The rate of lifestyle limitations due to arthritis among those experiencing three risk factors is statistically similar to those experiencing two.

As the number of risk factors a person with arthritis has increases, so does the rate of severe joint pain and work and lifestyle limitations.



Source: BRFSS, 2021

Notes

Disability includes anyone who reports having serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs, concentrating or making decisions, hearing, seeing, dressing or bathing, or who, because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, has difficulty doing errands alone.

Measures of geographic setting used in this data brief are measured using [Rural-Urban Commuting Area \(RUCA\) codes](#).

References

¹ Siviero P, Veronese N, Smith T, et al. Association between osteoarthritis and social isolation: data from the EPOSA Study. *J Am Geriatr Soc*. 2020;68(1): 87-95.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community. Published 2023. Accessed April 7, 2025. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>.