

Muscle matters: How your muscles affect your overall health

Muscles are everywhere in your body. Cardiac muscles pump blood through your heart. Smooth muscles make your digestive and respiratory systems work. And skeletal muscles let you move your 200-plus bones.^{1,2}

There are more than 650 named skeletal muscles in your body. When you keep them strong, you keep yourself healthy.

Types of musculoskeletal disorders

With so many bones and muscles comes a wide array of conditions affecting the musculoskeletal system—more than 150 in all. Some are congenital, but many can be prevented or effectively treated. Here are some common conditions.^{3,4,5}

Joints and connective tissues: osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, tendonitis, gout

Bones: osteoporosis, fractures, cancer

Muscles: muscle strain, muscle tear, sarcopenia

Spine: back pain, neck pain, herniated disc, sciatica

Regional: frozen shoulder, tennis elbow

Multiple body areas: fibromyalgia, lupus

A widespread concern

Musculoskeletal conditions affect people of all ages and backgrounds, although aging increases the prevalence. As many as one in five people lives with musculoskeletal pain. In fact, musculoskeletal conditions are the leading cause of pain worldwide, aside from cancer.

Is your pain acute or chronic? Acute pain starts quickly and lasts up to a few weeks. Chronic pain persists for three months or longer and can't be easily tied to a single cause.



1 <https://www.healthline.com/health/how-many-muscles-are-in-the-human-body>
2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_bones_of_the_human_skeleton
3 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/musculoskeletal-conditions>
4 <https://www.dmu.edu/medterms/musculoskeletal-system/musculoskeletal-system-diseases/>
5 <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehp/docs/birthdefects/surveillancemanual/photo-atlas/muscu.html>
6 http://www.worldspineday.org/what_is_back_pain/



Counting the costs

Musculoskeletal conditions reduce quality of life, impair your ability to perform basic daily functions and make it harder to be effective at work. They also have measurable financial costs.

Between medical bills and missed work, musculoskeletal conditions can be quite expensive. In the United States, these disorders account for 18% of health care visits and cost an estimated 5.7% of gross domestic product. In the EU, the direct and indirect costs associated with chronic pain (including musculoskeletal disorders, migraines and debilitating headaches) run to more than €440 billion, or 2-3% of GDP per member state.^{7,8}



Musculoskeletal disorders and overall health

Another concern is the connection to overall health. A musculoskeletal disorder is present in one third to one half of cases where someone has multiple morbidities (three or more chronic conditions).⁹

In some cases, there's a common cause. For example, obesity contributes to both low back pain and diabetes.^{10,11}

In other cases, there's a cause-and-effect relationship. The pain and limitations stemming from musculoskeletal disorders can lead to depression, anxiety and other mental health disorders.¹²



Simple steps for better health^{13,14,15}

If you want to improve your musculoskeletal health, here are some simple steps to take.

- 1 Improve your posture:** Learn to properly sit, stand and lift heavy objects to reduce pain and wear and tear on your joints.
- 2 Increase your activity:** Aim for 150 minutes per week of moderate physical activity, including cardiovascular, strength and flexibility exercises.
- 3 Balance your diet:** Be sure you're getting adequate amounts of vitamin D and calcium.
- 4 Eliminate tobacco:** Smoking increases the risk of osteoporosis and bone fractures.

Reduce consumption of alcohol and soft drinks. Excess use of these substances is associated with heightened risk for osteoporosis and bone fractures.

You don't have to be a bodybuilder for your muscles to matter. Healthy muscles help prevent or minimise a wide range of physical and mental health conditions. At our Musculoskeletal health resources hub, you can find the flyers and articles offering easy-to-action lifestyle changes to help you build muscle strength and prevent and manage musculoskeletal problems, including low back pain.

Also, Aetna International members can access the Health Hub—register if you haven't already—to quickly find self-help tools, professional services, member offers, and to submit and track claims and more. Within the Health Hub, you can learn more about the Kaia app, which provides curated, customised guidance from pain-treatment experts, and ClassPass, which offers virtual fitness classes. For more information about your health care benefits, contact your plan sponsor or one of Aetna International's expert sales consultants for group business or individuals and families.

Straighten up. Stretch out. Stay strong.

Musculoskeletal support resources:

<https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/musculoskeletal-health-support-resource.html>

Health Hub: <https://www.aetnainternational.com/members/login.do>

7 [https://www.nbna.org/files/\(01-21-2018\)%20By%20The%20Numbers%20-%20Musculoskeletal%20Conditions%20\(Big%20Picture\)%20\(USBJI\).pdf](https://www.nbna.org/files/(01-21-2018)%20By%20The%20Numbers%20-%20Musculoskeletal%20Conditions%20(Big%20Picture)%20(USBJI).pdf)
8 <https://www.sip-platform.eu/press-area/article/impact-of-pain-on-society-costs-the-eu-up-to-441-billion-euros-annually>
9 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/musculoskeletal-conditions>
10 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4792212/>

11 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3066828/>
12 <https://fitforwork.org/blog/musculoskeletal-disorders-msds-and-depression/>
13 <https://medlineplus.gov/guidetogoodposture.html>
14 <https://www.acatoday.org/News-Publications/Newsroom/News-Releases/National-Chiropractic-Health-Month-Take-Steps-to-Better-Musculoskeletal-Health>
15 https://www.lawrence.edu/conservatory/about/health_wellness/musculoskeletal_health