

EULAR
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PEOPLE WITH RHEUMATIC DISEASES HAVE DETERIORATED SEX LIVES

Sexual dysfunction should be addressed in the management of RMDs

Chronic rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) cause pain and disability, and can impair quality of life. RMDs also have an important impact on people's sex lives. Two abstracts presented at the 2022 EULAR Congress in Copenhagen looked at how RMDs impact the sexual sphere, and how specialized physical therapy might be used to support some groups.

To date, there have been limited studies on joint diseases and the impact on sex. Furthermore, many lack a control group and do not explore the different areas of sexuality. Dr Carlos Valera-Ribera's group examined the impact of chronic joint diseases on the sexual sphere in a cross-sectional observational study. The aim was to describe the prevalence of sexual dysfunction in people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) or psoriatic arthritis (PsA) compared to the general population.

A questionnaire was used to collect information from 188 patients in four different domains: pleasure, desire, arousal, and orgasm. In total, 48% of people with RA, 30% with PsA, and 6% of the control group had scores that indicated sexual dysfunction. The scores were typically higher in men than women.

The findings demonstrate that people with RA or PA have a deteriorated sexual life when compared to a healthy population – with impact evident across all domains of the sexual sphere. As shown in previous studies, age, gender, perceived health, employment situation, and economic status are related to the risk of suffering from sexual dysfunction. The researchers suggest that these factors must be considered as a holistic part of care, and recommend that the CSFQ-14 questionnaire be used as a tool for the management of sexual health in people with RMDs.

Although it is known that systemic rheumatic diseases such as systemic sclerosis (SSc) and idiopathic inflammatory myopathies (IIM) may affect all aspects of life – including sexual health – no non-pharmacological treatment has been proposed to date. Barbora Heřmánková and colleagues presented an abstract on their study into the effect of an 8-week physical therapy program on sexual health in 16 female patients with SSc and IIM, as compared to a control group with no intervention.

The intervention program included pelvic floor exercise and twice-weekly supervised physiotherapy for musculoskeletal problems that were thought to subjectively limit sexual function.

Compared to the control group, there was a statistically significant improvement in both sexual function, functional status, and quality of life. The authors conclude that their pilot physiotherapy

program not only prevented the natural course of progressive deterioration of functional abilities, but also led to a significant improvement in sexual function and overall quality of life in women with SSc and IIM. These findings suggest that physical therapy might be a potential therapeutic option for sexual problems in women with SSc and IIM.

Source

Valera-Ribera C, et al. Impact of chronic joint diseases on the sexual sphere with regards to a healthy population: a multicenter study. Presented at EULAR 2022; abstract OP0139.

Heřmánková B, et al. Effect of an 8-week specialized physical therapy program on sexual health in female patients with systemic sclerosis and idiopathic inflammatory myopathies: A pilot study. Presented at EULAR 2022; abstract OP. Presented at EULAR 2022; abstract OP0208-HPR.

About EULAR

EULAR – the European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology – is the European umbrella organisation representing scientific societies, health professional associations and organisations for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs). EULAR aims to reduce the burden of RMDs on individuals and society and to improve the treatment, prevention and rehabilitation of RMDs. To this end, EULAR fosters excellence in education and research in the field of rheumatology. It promotes the translation of research advances into daily care and fights for the recognition of the needs of people with RMDs by the EU institutions through advocacy action.

About the EULAR European Congress of Rheumatology

Since its introduction in 2000, the annual EULAR European Congress of Rheumatology has become the primary platform for exchange of scientific and clinical information in Europe. It is also a renowned forum for interaction between medical doctors, scientists, people with arthritis/rheumatism, health professionals and representatives of the pharmaceutical industry worldwide. The EULAR congress is usually held in June in one of the major cities in Europe.

The scientific programme covers a wide range of topics on clinical innovations, clinical, translational and basic science. Meetings set up by associations of people with arthritis/rheumatism, health professionals and the health care industry complement the programme. The poster sessions, offering lively interaction between presenters and participants, are regarded by many as the heart of the congress.

Over the years, the EULAR Congress has gained a reputation of being a most innovative platform for the practicing physician particularly with respect to the acquisition of information on novel clinical research. The congress attracts more than 18,000 delegates from more than 130 countries.

The aim of the EULAR European Congress of Rheumatology is to provide a forum of the highest standard for scientific, both clinical and basic, educational, and social exchange between professionals involved in rheumatology, liaising with patient organisations, in order to achieve progress in the clinical care of people with rheumatic diseases.

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