Are health care professionals advising adults with arthritis to become more physically active?

OBJECTIVE: To describe the proportion and characteristics of adults with self-reported, doctor-diagnosed arthritis who report ever having been advised by a health professional to become more physically active and to assess whether the advice was associated with recent physical activity.

METHODS: Using population-based data from the 2003 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, respondents were classified according to their arthritis status, whether or not they were ever advised by a health professional to increase their physical activity to help them better manage their arthritis, and whether they engaged in exercise or physical activity within the past month.

RESULTS: Overall, 42% of respondents with arthritis reported ever being advised to increase their physical activity to help their arthritis. Respondents who were more likely to have ever received the advice were female, middle-aged or older, African American, Hispanic, overweight or obese, sedentary or insufficiently physically active, and had higher levels of education. Persons who reported ever receiving the advice were less likely to report that they had exercised within the past month. A higher level of education was the only variable associated with recent exercise or physical activity among those advised to be more active.

CONCLUSION: Less than 50% of adults with arthritis report ever being advised by a health professional to become more physically active.
Advice alone appears insufficient to promote increased physical activity in adults with arthritis.

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