

# JOINT *Matters*



## Joint Endeavor to Prevent Hip Arthritis

When the ancient hominins started to walk upright, the female wing of our ancestral species found themselves in an “obstetrical dilemma.” Compared to males, her more rounded and broader pelvis became an adaptation to accommodate childbirth while balancing the need for efficient locomotion. This sex difference in the [anatomy of the human hip](#) may increase a woman’s risk for developing osteoarthritis (OA). Nearly two-thirds of those who have altered hip structure, a significant risk factor for osteoarthritis, are women.

Despite this glaring statistic, women are vastly underrepresented in OA research. Both clinical and preclinical studies have primarily used only male participants and specimens for data collection and analyses. Also, women experience [hip OA](#) differently than men: Women have more significant pain, disability and limitations of physical function. The timing of puberty, where the musculoskeletal system experiences substantial changes, also differs between the sexes.

Yet, much of the research contributing to treatment and prevention is based on the outcomes in men.

“Hip arthritis research is dominated by male participants, but the clinical population tends to be female dominated,” said Cara Lewis, PT, PhD, professor of physical therapy, rehabilitation sciences and medicine at Boston University and a [HipOA award recipient](#) from the Arthritis Foundation. “My team has been trying to address this disconnect between who is being studied and who is really being affected, and what factors contribute to the risk of hip osteoarthritis.”

In over 90% of cases, the cause of hip OA is thought to be altered hip shape where the ball or the head of the femur fits abnormally into the hip’s socket. In some cases, there can be excessive bone growth on the femoral head or a form of cam lesion, leading to a “bump” that can pinch during hip movements. Over time, the abnormal contact and friction of the ball and socket joint can lead to hip OA.

### FEATURED IN THIS STORY:



Cara Lewis, PT, PhD,  
Boston University

"The bump develops over time. In men, the research is pretty conclusive that it develops in response to heavy loading through sport before skeletal maturity around puberty," said Dr. Lewis. "We don't have a good idea of the risk profile in women. We don't know which sports may alter that risk or when. That's some of what our work is trying to dig into."

Interestingly, she added, not all individuals with altered hip morphology have hip osteoarthritis, suggesting that factors like movement patterns are likely to contribute to the elevated risk.



Dr. Lewis and her team will evaluate hip morphology and movement in young women (18- to 30-year-olds) using high-resolution MRI for her study. They will focus on those who play competitive sports associated with a higher prevalence of altered hip shape, including ice hockey, soccer, distance running or dance. The team will also record joint movement patterns in a 3D motion capture laboratory during functional activities. With their data, they will investigate the associations between hip health, morphology and movement before the development of hip pain and arthritic changes to identify clinical features that increase the risk of future hip arthritis.

"This grant award from the Foundation is so fundamental to the success of being able to investigate the female hip and help keep their hips healthy, especially for our athletes," said Dr. Lewis. "I was just really honored to get this funding because it speaks to the importance of the work we do and the need for the work we do."

The HipOA grant is part of an initiative by the Foundation's [Osteoarthritis Clinical Trial Network](#) called FastOA that seeks to identify and define patient populations at risk of developing osteoarthritis of the hip more quickly than the general population.

## ADVOCACY UPDATE

The Arthritis Foundation and American College of Rheumatology strongly oppose recent cuts to public health programs essential for managing arthritis and other chronic diseases. They warn that eliminating funding for community programs, research and health services puts millions at risk — especially veterans and those with lifelong conditions.

These cuts threaten critical care, reduce scientific progress and limit public health efforts. The organizations urge policymakers to protect these programs, emphasizing that real lives — not just numbers — are at stake. They remain committed to advocating for the chronic disease community and call on others to do the same. [Read the full press release.](#)

## Other Updates

- The HELP Copays Act was reintroduced in the Senate by Senators Roger Marshall and Tim Kaine. This bill would ensure that copay assistance counts toward patient cost-sharing, making medications more affordable for patients.
- The Arthritis Foundation joined 17 patient groups in a [letter](#) to Congressional Committee leadership urging action on PBM reform. We will continue to make this a priority, including [step therapy](#) reform as part of the effort.

Are you ready to make a difference? [Take the first step by visiting the Arthritis Foundation's Action Center.](#) There, you can find a topic that resonates with you and start advocating for change.

## How Do Seniors Make Decisions About Biologics?

The incidence of rheumatoid arthritis has been rising globally, including in the United States, and is predicted to continue rising. However, people in our country experience unequal access to care. Racial and ethnic disparities compounded with socioeconomic differences directly impact health outcomes. Thus, rheumatoid arthritis (RA) medications that often include expensive biologic disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs pose a significant economic burden on patients that could cause them to abandon their treatment.

The Arthritis Foundation has awarded Aryana Sepassi, PharmD, assistant professor at the University of California, San Diego, Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, a 2024 Rheumatoid Arthritis Research Program award to investigate how RA patients on Medicare make decisions regarding their biologic medications. This research may shed light on the disparities in treatment adherence among different racial and ethnic groups, including blacks and Hispanics.

"Medicare is a comprehensive medical insurance structure; people with Medicare typically don't pay as much out of pocket as those with commercial private insurance plans. But even with that, some patients have trouble paying for their treatment," said Dr. Sepassi. "Biologics are a mainstay therapy for rheumatoid arthritis and can be expensive. I wanted to know which Medicare beneficiaries are more vulnerable to cost-related medication abandonment."

Approximately 2.0% of Medicare beneficiaries have rheumatoid arthritis, which translates to an estimated 1.3 million individuals aged 65 or older with the autoimmune disease. Furthermore, Medicare beneficiaries with RA bear twice the annual health care costs compared to those without the disease. A significant contribution to this cost comes from the biologics needed to treat moderate to severe disease. These Medicare patients pay an average of \$23,544/year more compared to those not using biologics.

However, Medicare has different options and parts, which in turn have different out-of-pocket maximums. Specifically, for rheumatoid arthritis, Medicare Part B covers a much higher percentage of the cost of biologics

administered at the doctor's clinic, while Part D, which covers biologics that are self-administered, typically pays a much smaller proportion. The IRA enacted a "cap" of \$2,000 on all Part D spending, and patients can also opt into the Medicare prescription payment plan, which smooths out payments for Part D drugs over the year.

"To understand how this cap with Part D may affect affordability and adherence to RA biologics, we need to first understand how patients make decisions on these biologics without any caps in place," said Dr. Sepassi. "Ideally, my proposed research can help identify who used to spend over \$2,000 for their Part D medications, if any. These people would be the ones who would benefit the most from the IRA's cap."

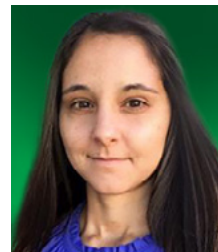
Conversely, implementation of this limit can affect a patient's decision making on biologics, she noted. For example, if more individuals of a certain population relied more on Part B coverage for biologics than Part D, then Dr. Sepassi hypothesized that these individuals would now be more likely to adhere to their medications under Part D with the new cap.

For her research, Dr. Sepassi will investigate the differences between Black, Hispanic, Asian American, Pacific Islander and non-Hispanic white Medicare RA beneficiaries in their approach to biologic treatment. Specifically, she aims to better understand the proportion of patients who started office-administered biologics covered by Part B after abandoning expensive self-administered biologics. The results of Dr. Sepassi's research have the potential to shape future policies aimed at improving drug affordability and patient outcomes across different communities.

"I'm pleased to see that the Arthritis Foundation saw merit in my proposal," said Dr. Sepassi. "I think this is an area of research that is needed, and as a new investigator, this award will give me the resources I need to jump-start this line of research that I hope to continue in the future."

[Learn more about the Foundation's Rheumatoid Arthritis Research Program.](#)

### FEATURED IN THIS STORY:



Aryana Sepassi, PharmD,  
University of California,  
San Diego



## The 2024 Howley Prizes for Arthritis Research

The Arthritis Foundation announced the 2024 Howley Prizes to Kurt Spindler, MD, and Candace Feldman, MD, MPH, ScD, at the 2025 Pathways Conference, which brings together people living with arthritis and the Foundation's volunteers and staff. These awards recognize physician-scientists who have made important contributions to arthritis-related research and have shown exceptional commitment to volunteer work through the Foundation.

### The 2024 Lee C. Howley Senior Prize for Arthritis Scientific Research

Dr. Spindler earned his bachelor's degree in biology from Rutgers University and then received his medical degree in orthopedics from the University of Pennsylvania, where he also received research training. He then continued his medical career as a fellow at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, specializing in orthopedic sports medicine.

Dr. Spindler is currently the associate chief of clinical research for the entire Cleveland Clinic organization. In this role, he is dedicated to developing, implementing, overseeing and optimizing clinical research enterprise-wide. In addition to maintaining clinical and surgical practice in orthopedic sports medicine, he has also been an SEC Division 1 team physician, an educator, professor and mentor to clinician scientists and clinician scholars across all fields of medicine. His clinical expertise includes evaluating and treating all sports medicine injuries. His surgical focus is on arthroscopic knee surgery, especially ACL reconstruction.

He has been an NIH-funded researcher since 2006 with multiple competitively funded grants. He is an active reviewer for the NIH and has served as a permanent member of two NIH study sections. Additionally, Dr. Spindler has led the development of a scientifically valid, cost-effective and scalable clinical outcome tracking system called OME. This prospective patient-reported outcomes capture system helped transform clinical research and clinical practice. Dr. Spindler helped develop the Cleveland Clinic as a leader in Clinical Outcomes (OME), Multicenter Studies (MOON and BEAR MOON) and musculoskeletal research.

One of Dr. Spindler's major endeavors has been to identify risk factors for post-traumatic osteoarthritis (PTOA) after knee ACL injury and treatment. This mutual scientific and patient care clinical problem has led him to participate scientifically in think tanks, research strategy committees and clinical

studies networks with the Arthritis Foundation. These include participating as a member of the Arthritis Foundation's research strategy committee, in the osteoarthritis clinical trials network (OACTN), in the Foundation's SNOW conferences and as a reviewer for the Foundation's grants. His work has significantly improved patient care and outcomes in the field of orthopedic sports medicine.



Howley Prize recipient (center) Kurt Spindler, MD, with President and CEO of the Arthritis Foundation, Steven Taylor (left) and Immediate Past Chair of the Arthritis Foundation's National Board of Directors, Matt Mooney.

Finally, Dr. Spindler has been and continues to be an active member and leader in regional, national and international orthopedic and sports medicine professional organizations. In 2022, he was appointed the 50th President of AOSSM. He currently serves as co-chairman of the ORS/OREF/AAOS CSCDP and co-chair of the PROMs Taskforce for AAOS. He has published over 325 peer-reviewed publications and presented over 700 talks, principally

on clinical outcomes, evidence-based medicine and knee ligament healing. Dr. Spindler received the Kappa Delta award in 2012 and 2019 and the AOSSM O'Donahue award in 2001, 2014 and 2017.

"I am honored beyond measure. The Arthritis Foundation has played a pivotal role on a national level in stimulating research in OA and PTOA," said Dr. Spindler. "It has been my pleasure to participate, and I look forward to many more discoveries that improve patient care. Thank you so much for this honor."

## **The 2024 Lee C. Howley Junior Prize for Early Career Investigators in Arthritis Research**

Dr. Feldman received her bachelor's and medical degrees as well as her master's in public health from Yale University. After graduating from medical school, she began her residency in internal medicine and primary care at Brigham and Women's Hospital, where she continued as a fellow in rheumatology. She is currently an assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and an associate physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital, where she co-directs the Health Equity Initiatives.

Dr. Feldman's research portfolio includes large database studies using electronic health records, Medicaid and Medicare claims data, qualitative analyses, survey-based analyses, community-engaged research and intervention design and analysis with a focus on understanding and addressing structural drivers of inequities and social risk factor burden. With her collaborators, she has extensively studied and defined inequities by race, ethnicity and social determinants of health in rheumatic disease care and outcomes. Dr. Feldman has designed and led community and academic-based interventions to address uncovered needs. She continues to mentor premedical and medical students, fellows and junior faculty with a specific track record of and passion for mentoring and sponsoring trainees who are underrepresented in medicine and/or from first-generation low-income backgrounds, a commitment that bodes well for the future of arthritis research.

At the Arthritis Foundation, Dr. Feldman has served on the DEI Task Force and reviews grant applications. She currently



Howley Prize recipient Candace Feldman, MD, MPH, ScD (center) with President and CEO of the Arthritis Foundation, Steven Taylor (left) and Immediate Past Chair of the Arthritis Foundation's National Board of Directors, Matt Mooney.

leads a multisite grant from the Arthritis Foundation to build a national academy to advance and enrich workforce diversity in rheumatology.

"I am so honored to receive this award. I am a tremendous admirer of the work the Arthritis Foundation does for people living with arthritis and also the work they do to support us as physicians and researchers," said Dr. Feldman.

[Learn more about the Foundation's Howley Prizes for Arthritis Research and past recipients.](#)

## Announcements



Anna Lampe, PhD

### Meet Our Senior Director for Autoimmune and Inflammatory Arthritis, Anna Lampe, PhD

Anna Lampe, PhD, leads the Autoimmune and Inflammatory Arthritis program at the Arthritis Foundation, including rheumatoid arthritis (RA), juvenile arthritis (JA) and related indications. Dr. Lampe directs research strategies and grantmaking activities for a diverse portfolio of scientific awards that support the overarching goal of improving health outcomes for people living with arthritis by advancing basic, translational, clinical and regulatory science related to autoimmune and inflammatory arthritis.

Previously, Dr. Lampe oversaw research training and workforce development programs at the National Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society and co-led department-wide efforts to incorporate the patient voice into research strategy. Prior to that, Dr. Lampe worked in the biotech industry pursuing preclinical vaccine development. Dr. Lampe conducted her graduate research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she received a PhD in immunology.

### Leading the Way in Ease-of-Use Design

The Arthritis Foundation's Ease of Use® Certification Program certifies products and packages that have been tested through both lab and human factor evaluations and are proven easier to use for people with arthritis and chronic pain.

As the Foundation champions life-changing resources for people living with arthritis and chronic pain, we collaborate with both consumer and health care companies to design and bring products and packages to market that are easier to use.

In the consumer arena, we have certified items as small as a tube of mascara or lipstick, to larger items like a set of bed sheets designed to be easier to use when making a bed. In the health care arena, the certifications range from medical devices, bottle and cap containers and even something as small as a pill with indentations making them easier to pick up and hold.

Companies who are bringing accessible design into their design process are innovatively thinking about many areas – weight, linear force, rotational force, action fatigue, joint placement, grip span, sharp edges and whether tools, such as scissors, are required to open packaging. These considerations are important when thinking about how to impact someone's day-to-day activities.

Ease of Use® Certified products are available both in retail stores and online. Certified medical devices and bottle/cap containers, associated with many treatments, are available through prescription. [Find a list of products and packages receiving the Ease-of-Use Certification.](#)

### Partners for Patients

As a health care provider, you're invited to join Partners for Patients, a program that connects you with expert resources and a supportive community through the Arthritis Foundation to help improve patient care and outcomes. By becoming a partner, you'll gain access to tools that connect your patients with vital Arthritis Foundation services and support, fostering stronger collaboration and better results. Once you join, we'll highlight our partnership with you in both patient and medical communities and keep you informed with the latest updates and advancements in arthritis research and care. [Learn more about the Partners for Patients program.](#)







## The NOPAIN Act

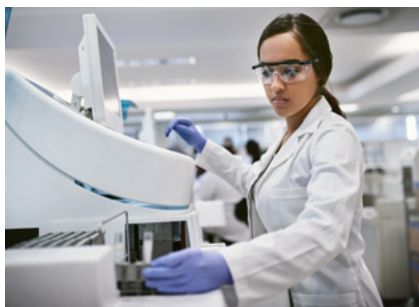
**The National Opioid Prescription and Pain Management Improvement Act**, or NOPAIN Act, is a legislative proposal aimed at addressing the opioid crisis in the United States by promoting the use of non-opioid pain management alternatives and improving access to care for people with chronic pain. It is designed to reduce reliance on prescription opioids, which have been a major driver of the opioid epidemic, while still ensuring that patients have appropriate pain management options. Starting Jan. 1, 2025, the NOPAIN Act mandates that Medicare provides additional reimbursement for qualifying non-opioid options when used in outpatient surgeries.



## Get Involved With JA Camps

Health care professionals can make an impact by volunteering as camp counselors at juvenile arthritis (JA) camps across the country! Join us for an unforgettable experience connecting with campers and developing valuable skills. Your support makes all the difference to kids with arthritis. [Find a JA Camp](#).

# Arthritis Foundation Request for Proposals



## Rheumatoid Arthritis Research Program — Advancing Understanding of Rheumatoid Arthritis Disease Onset, Progression and Treatment Response

This Request for Proposals invites applications that seek to better understand and predict rheumatoid arthritis (RA) development, progression and treatment response. This includes applications focused on investigating the conversion of pre-RA to clinical RA, disease progression, and treatment response and safety. Competitive projects should aim to define risk factors/biomarkers of conversion of pre-RA to clinical RA, disease progression, treatment response, pathogenic mechanisms and/or therapeutic approach personalization. The pilot research award can be up to \$150,000 inclusive of 8% indirect costs for up to 2 years. Large research awards can be up to \$450,000 inclusive of 8% indirect costs and up to 3 years. **The letter of intent is due on Monday, June 2, 2025, at 2 PM ET.**

[Review the RFP here.](#)

## Events



Science panel speakers: Peggy Crow, MD, Greg Myer, PhD and Theresa Wampler Muskardin, MD.

### Science Panel Discussion at the 2025 Pathways Conference

Each year, the Arthritis Foundation hosts the Pathways Conference, which brings together people living with arthritis and the Foundation's volunteers and staff. The 2025 Pathways Conference included a science panel discussion that was moderated by Foundation President & CEO Steven Taylor, leading researchers Peggy Crow, MD, physician-in-chief emeritus at the Hospital for Special Surgery, Greg Myer, PhD, professor of orthopedics at Emory University and Theresa Wampler Muskardin, MD, assistant professor of medicine and pediatrics at the Hospital for Special Surgery. They shared their enthusiasm for several recent developments in arthritis research.

Dr. Crow described the theory and the latest clinical results illustrating the power of CAR T-cell therapies to deplete B cells and help patients with refractory cases of inflammatory diseases like lupus and potentially other rheumatic diseases. Dr. Myer discussed the work of his team and others to bring technology like virtual reality to physical therapy to expand the capabilities of physical therapy and make it more accessible. Dr. Muskardin described the current limitations of personalized medicine in rheumatology and how research like hers into "synovium on a chip" technology has the potential to lead us to a future where doctors can much more effectively match patients to the treatment that is most likely to work for them. Steven Taylor concluded the discussion by emphasizing that all these exciting areas of research are continuously evolving, highlighting the need for continued investment in research to continue to improve the quality of life for all people living with arthritis.

### 2025 STATE OF ARTHRITIS RESEARCH

### State of Arthritis Research Webinar

On Feb. 25, the Arthritis Foundation hosted the State of Arthritis Research webinar. The sessions included a talk by keynote speaker Kristi Kuhn, MD, PhD, Professor, Medicine-Rheumatology at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. She discussed mechanisms by which gut bacteria can generate rheumatoid arthritis-associated autoantibodies and consequently the development of RA. The webinar also included talks from Arthritis Foundation staff leaders about how the Arthritis Foundation is contributing to advancing the science in arthritis and key policy issues that impact arthritis patients' access to care and ways to access Arthritis Foundation patient resources and support services. [Watch the recording of the webinar.](#)



### The Congress of Clinical Rheumatology — East, Sandestin, Florida, May 1–4, 2025

The conference brings together rheumatologists to hear from world-renowned speakers, engage in practical sessions and discover the latest information, tools and resources available. If you are attending CCR-EAST, please be sure to visit the Arthritis Foundation's exhibit booth to learn about Partners for Patients and the complimentary resources available for health care professionals.



### Juvenile Arthritis Family Summit, Salt Lake City, Utah, July 10–13, 2025

The annual JA Family Summit (previously known as the National JA Conference) is the Arthritis Foundation's signature nationwide event for families affected by juvenile arthritis and childhood rheumatic diseases. This four-day educational conference focuses on health, wellness and fun for families, children and teens (ages six months and up) and young adults (ages 18–30) affected by juvenile arthritis and related childhood rheumatic diseases. [Learn more about registration, hotel reservations and volunteer opportunities.](#)



## COMMUNITY IN ACTION

Make an impact! Join the Arthritis Foundation's signature events happening at a location near you.

**The Walk to Cure Arthritis** is the largest arthritis gathering in the world. It celebrates people living with arthritis while raising funds.

**Carolina Hills Classic Bike Tour (CHC)**, presented by Amgen, is a fully appointed and e-bike-friendly road cycling adventure in the foothills of the unmatched beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Fundraising from this event fuels Arthritis Foundation advocacy, scientific research and life-changing programs. Explore the quiet winding roads, vibrant art scene, and welcoming hospitality of this premier Southeastern cycling destination.

**Orthopedic Paceline Challenge** is calling for nominations across the country for orthopedic surgeons. Clip in for an iconic cycling experience as an orthopedist ambassador at the inaugural Carolina Hills Classic Bike Tour in June 2025. Members of the Medical Honoree Paceline will enjoy epic riding and national recognition as they raise funds for a better future for everyone living with arthritis.

**California Coast Classic Bike Tour**, presented by Amgen, is a scenic bike ride that takes place over eight days and covers 525 miles along the coast on U.S. Highway 1. The tour starts in the heart of San Francisco and ends on the iconic strand of Los Angeles.

**Ride Your Way with Arthritis Cycling Experience** allows you to participate in our signature cycling events virtually if you are unable to attend in person.

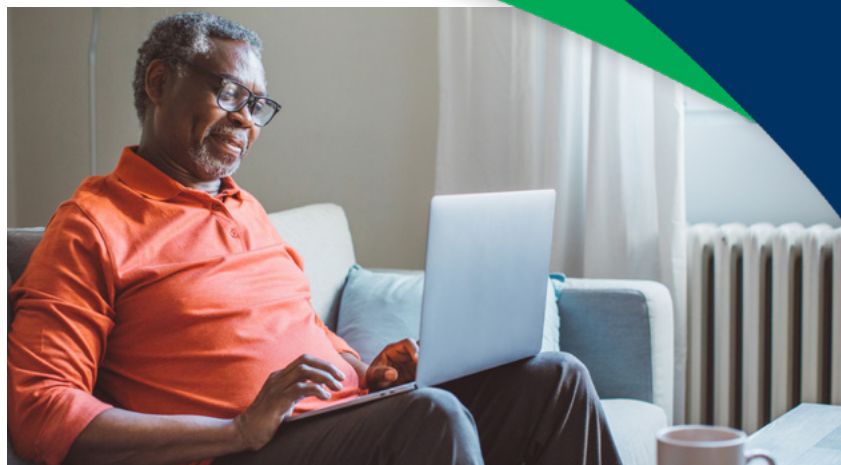
**Galas and Gatherings** include local fund-raising galas, golf outings, car shows or themed parties. These fun-filled events offer a festive way to help the Arthritis Foundation and benefit our entire community.

To learn more about our events and to participate, [visit arthritis.org/events](https://www.arthritis.org/events).

## LET'S CONNECT!

To ensure you are receiving our most up-to-date communication from *Joint Matters*, [please visit our website](https://www.arthritis.org) to confirm your subscription.

You can also email us at [afscience@arthritis.org](mailto:afscience@arthritis.org) for queries and to unsubscribe from *Joint Matters*.



## Educational Resources for Your Patients

### Live Yes! Connect Groups

Connect Groups provide supportive social connections and are open to parents/guardians of children with rheumatic diseases and to adults living with any type of arthritis or rheumatic diseases. These virtual and in-person groups bring people together for fun social and informative educational events and activities focused on mutual support and positive coping strategies for living well. [Learn about our Connect Groups and upcoming events.](#)

### Living Well Events

Arthritis creates a unique set of challenges that require an equally unique set of solutions. Whether it's managing symptoms like pain and inflammation or discovering new ways to achieve everyday tasks, our in-person Living Well events empower you to take control of your condition. [Learn about our Living Well events and upcoming events.](#)

### Decoding Inflammatory Arthritis Meds and Labs, April 24, 7:00 – 8:15 p.m. ET

This webinar provides a deeper understanding of the treatments and medications used to treat inflammatory types of arthritis – including how to maximize their benefits and manage potential side effects. It also explains how to interpret lab results and offers expert tips on effective doctor-patient communication. [Register for the event.](#)

### Women's Health & Arthritis, May 22, 7:00 – 8:15 p.m. ET

This webinar will explore the specific health concerns and challenges faced by women with arthritis with a multigenerational panel of women. It will discuss hormonal factors, pregnancy and arthritis, menopause and strategies for managing symptoms and maintaining overall well-being. [Register for the event.](#)