

SARCOPENIA (AGE-RELATED FRAILTY)

KNOW THE FACTS

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER | 2H 2023

What is sarcopenia?

Sarcopenia, which often leads to age-related frailty, is a condition characterized by progressive loss of muscle mass, strength, and function mainly in older adults.¹ It is a type of muscle atrophy primarily caused by the natural aging process that affects 10–16% of the elderly worldwide.^{2,3}

With many contributing factors, sarcopenia results in chronic low-grade inflammation which can affect all body systems and organs, particularly skeletal muscle.¹ The resulting muscle weakness contributes to falls and fractures, which often lead to hospitalizations and surgeries.³

For older people especially, fall-related injuries can affect their ability to care for themselves resulting in a loss of independence, cause an increased risk of complications and possibly even death.^{1,2,3}

What does sarcopenia look like?

The most common symptom of sarcopenia is muscle weakness.

Symptoms may include:

- Overall weakness and fatigue¹
- Loss of energy¹
- Balance problems¹
- Trouble walking and standing¹

The best way to determine if you have sarcopenia, however, is through a physical exam. Your healthcare provider can run a number of tests specifically designed for this disease.

Sarcopenia's Impact



Functional decline



Cognitive impairment



Hypertension



Depression



Increased hospitalization



Mortality

What are the biggest risk factors of sarcopenia?

The biggest risk factor is aging, as we may lose as much as 8% of muscle mass each decade, starting during mid-life. Although not as dominant, other risk factors include:^{1,3}

- Chronic diseases, such as diabetes, kidney disease, rheumatoid arthritis, to name a few
- Lack of exercise
- Obesity
- Poor nutrition, including low intakes of protein-rich foods
- Lack of sleep
- Cigarette smoking

What is the impact of sarcopenia now and potentially in the future?

The aging population in the U.S. has been rapidly increasing. Over the last two decades, the number of people aged 65 or older in the U.S. grew from 35 million to nearly 56 million, with 1 in 6 people in the U.S. now 65 years or older.⁴ This number is expected to nearly double to 95 million by the year 2060.⁵ On average, sarcopenia impacts 5–13% of elderly people aged 60–70 years of age and 11–50% of those 80 or above.⁶

Sarcopenia also notably impacts healthcare costs. A 2000 study estimated that sarcopenia resulted in \$18.5 billion in direct annual U.S. healthcare costs. The study estimated a 10% reduction in sarcopenia prevalence would result in savings of \$1.1 billion per year (in 2000 dollars).⁷ A more recent 2019 study estimated that sarcopenia leads to more than \$40 billion in hospitalization costs annually in the U.S.⁸

A large and growing aging population will continue to directly affect healthcare costs associated with sarcopenia.

How is sarcopenia managed?

There are no FDA-approved medications to treat sarcopenia. Currently, the condition is managed with lifestyle changes, which can include increasing physical activity, if possible, and dietary changes. There are, however, [clinical trials](#) currently underway which have shown positive results in controlling the inflammation associated with sarcopenia.²

1. National Cancer Institute (NIH), "[NCI Dictionaries: Sarcopenia.](#)"
2. Cleveland Clinic, "[Overview: Sarcopenia.](#)"
3. Yuan, S., & Larsson, S. C. (2023, March 10). *Epidemiology of sarcopenia: Prevalence, risk factors, and consequences...* Metabolism Journal. [https://www.metabolismjournal.com/article/S0026-0495\(23\)00136-1/fulltext](https://www.metabolismjournal.com/article/S0026-0495(23)00136-1/fulltext)
4. The United States Census Bureau, "[2020 Census: 1 in 6 People in the United States Were 65 and Over.](#)"
5. Population Reference Bureau (PRB), "[Fact Sheet: Aging in the United States.](#)"
6. National Library of Medicine (NIH), "[An overview of sarcopenia: facts and numbers on prevalence and clinical impact.](#)"
7. National Library of Medicine (NIH), "[The healthcare costs of sarcopenia in the United States.](#)"
8. National Library of Medicine (NIH), "[Economic Impact of Hospitalizations in the US Adults with Sarcopenia.](#)"

SARCOPENIA BY THE NUMBERS

A large and growing aging population will continue to directly affect U.S. healthcare costs associated with sarcopenia.

56 M

56 million people (1 in 6) in the U.S. are over the age of 65

x2

The U.S. 65+ population is expected to nearly double over the next 40 years

5–13%

Sarcopenia affects 5–13% of those 60–70 years of age

11–50%

Sarcopenia affects 11–50% of those 80+

\$40.4 B

Annual healthcare costs directly associated with sarcopenia

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