

HEALTH AND TECHNOLOGY

Do you think you have arthritis? Help is at your fingertip.

Free Apple application, ArthritisID and ArthritisID PRO, were developed by Vancouver health experts

BY PAMELA FAYERMAN
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Two new mobile applications that help people with sore joints figure out whether they have arthritis and show doctors how to examine patients for the condition are making their international debut.

The free Apple applications — ArthritisID for health consumers and ArthritisID PRO — were developed by Vancouver arthritis experts.

Older, less digital-savvy people will always prefer printed material, said rheumatologist Dr. John Esdaile, but “we kept hearing from pharmacists,

family doctors, physiotherapists and patients that they were buried under handouts. Hence the app.”

Arthritis is one of the most common chronic health conditions among Canadians.

The app for patients is in lay language and features an arthritis screening tool to help consumers answer for themselves if they may have some form of arthritis. It also contains prevention and treatment strategies, as well as information on exercise, diet and nutrition for protecting joint health.

The version for doctors and other health professionals has an interactive screening tool, best practice (evidence-based)

guidelines for diagnosing and treating arthritis, five instructional videos to show doctors how to do thorough joint examinations and all the information available to patients.

Esdaile, a professor of medicine at both the University of B.C. and the University of Calgary, said early detection is important for patients but there is such a shortage of rheumatologists across Canada that it's often impossible to get a timely diagnosis. As a result, he said, it's essential for family doctors to recognize the symptoms of the various types of arthritis and to give patients the right advice about medications, prevention and lifestyle factors.

“The professional version of the app has videos showing how to examine the joints properly. Many family doctors may not have ever learned how to do that,” he said, noting the apps are in both English and French. The videos demonstrate the proper techniques for doing a full body exam and close inspections of the knees, hips, shoulders and elbows.

Doctors who use the app qualify for continuing medical education credits since it has been accredited by the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the body that sets standards for doctors' credentials.

The apps were developed by the Arthritis Research Centre

of Canada, of which Esdaile is scientific director, and Arthritis Consumer Experts, a patient education and advocacy organization that gets some of its funding from pharmaceutical companies.

Cheryl Koehn, president of Arthritis Consumer Experts and a co-developer of the software applications, said even though arthritis affects one out of every six Canadians, it is often a misunderstood condition.

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The new Apple app will help those people with arthritis.