

MUSCULOSKELETAL MEDICINE

Musculoskeletal Medicine is that branch of medicine dealing with problems related to pain or dysfunction in the muscles, bones and joints of the body. The bones form the skeleton that provides the rigid framework for the shape of the body. The joints allow for movements. The muscles perform and control those movements.

Various problems affect the musculoskeletal system. Most people are familiar with fractures, (cracks or breaks in bones), which usually occur as a result of trauma. Arthritis is a condition in which individual joints become inflamed, which makes them swollen and painful. There are many causes of arthritis; some are well understood, but others are still a mystery.

There are other, much more common aches and pains in various parts of the body, such as the back, the neck, the shoulder, the elbow, the hip and the knee. Although sometimes called "arthritis", these complaints are often not due to joints being inflamed. In many cases the exact source and cause of pain are unknown and cannot be discovered using common tests. The term - **musculoskeletal pain**, is used to describe these conditions. The pain is real, but is not usually evident on X-rays. It means that the problem lies somewhere in the bones, joints, nerves or muscles of the affected part of the body, even though the exact source is not clear. **Musculoskeletal Medicine** is a branch of medicine that deals specifically with these difficult conditions.

Therefore, **Musculoskeletal Medicine** is defined by the sorts of problem that patients suffer, rather than by the types of doctors who treat them. Some people will know about specialties such as Rheumatology, Orthopaedic Surgery, and Rehabilitation Medicine. These are related to **Musculoskeletal Medicine**, but each one focuses on particular conditions or special ways of treating them. For example, Rheumatologists have particular skill in treating inflamed joints in conditions like rheumatoid arthritis. Orthopaedic Surgeons are experts in fractures, deformities and other conditions that need surgery for their treatment. Rehabilitation specialists help people to overcome the disabilities and handicaps caused by various disorders.

Musculoskeletal Medicine deals with conditions and problems that overlap, but do not fall readily into any of these established specialties. Some specialists in those areas also practice **Musculoskeletal Medicine**. They require only some extra training and knowledge to extend beyond their original specialty. Some general practitioners also practice **Musculoskeletal Medicine**, having completed special diplomas awarded by Universities. This training pays special attention to the common musculoskeletal conditions for which there are no traditional cures. **Musculoskeletal Medicine** draws on the established specialties, and works with them, but focuses on difficult pain problems in particular.

“Musculoskeletal Medicine treatment commences with a detailed initial assessment leading to a tailored treatment program that may include a broad range of therapies from postural advice, exercises, medications for pain control, hands on manual therapy to X-ray guided spinal injections.”

Comprehensive spinal and joint care

Musculoskeletal Medicine ♦ Rheumatology ♦ Sports Medicine ♦ Orthopaedic Surgery ♦ Physiotherapy ♦ Pilates
Osteopathy ♦ Psychology ♦ Massage ♦ Hydrotherapy ♦ Nutrition ♦ Ergonomics ♦ Rehab gymnasium

Medical training:

Post graduate University based courses in musculoskeletal medicine only commenced in Australia in 1992 at Flinders University in Adelaide. Victor Wilk, Robert Brzozek and Aston Wan have all completed post-graduate Diplomas in musculoskeletal medicine and Drs Wilk and Brzozek are Fellows of the Australasian Faculty of Musculoskeletal Medicine. They have been actively involved in teaching other doctors in the area of spinal pain management. In addition, Dr Wilk has been a Past President of the Australian Association of Musculoskeletal Medicine and also holds a Master of Pain Medicine degree. These special skills are not currently recognised by the Government, although submissions have been made to achieve acceptance as registered specialists. In the meantime although we practice in a specialised field, the rebate from the government is only at the General Practitioner rate. If you feel that you would like to support their case for specialization, you can contact the Minister for Health, Nicola Roxon, email: nicola.roxon.mp@aph.gov.au Phone: 02 6277 7220, Fax: 02 6273 4146. or Melb office : 204 Nicholson Street, Footscray VIC 3011, Ph: (03) 9687 7355, Fax: (03) 9689 6523

Vocational Registration:

Vocational Registration was introduced by the College of General Practitioners in the early 1990s to ensure quality assurance amongst General Practitioners. As Victor Wilk has been practicing exclusively in musculoskeletal medicine, he is not eligible for vocational registration. (Robert Brzozek and Aston Wan have been vocationally registered in the past.)

Consultations:

For non-vocationally registered General Practitioners, the common item number is an Item 53. This covers a consultation from between 5 and 25 minutes. Typical Family Medicine Practice consultations last for between 5 and 15 minutes, resulting in most General Practitioners seeing between 5 and 6 patients per hour. Musculoskeletal Medicine consultations take considerably longer in time, due to the increased complexity of problems. Consultations are typically between 15 and 25 minutes. Long consultations (over 25 minutes) attract a higher rebate fee (item 54). Adding to the complexity of the consultation is the need to send a detailed assessment and management plan back to the referring practitioner.

Consultation fee levels:

The nature of musculoskeletal medicine consultations are similar in content to that of rheumatologists and other consultant physicians. The standard initial fee for an initial consultation with a consultant physician is \$200 with a rebate of \$110.00, and the Federal Government has just introduced a new fee for complex problems taking longer than 45minutes = \$300 with a rebate of \$202.60. Contrast this with the rebate of \$51.85. Unfortunately for patients attending non-vocationally registered doctors the Medicare schedule fee has not risen at all since 1991, (and prior to that only rose 5% since 1985), whilst the costs of providing a quality service continue to rise. For vocationally registered (VR) doctors the rebates are a bit higher, shown in the last column.

Musculoskeletal Consultation	Usual Fee	Medicare Rebate	VR Rebates	80% rebate
Standard (less than 20-25 mins)	\$80	\$21.00	\$32.80	\$64.00
Long (20-45 mins)	\$150	\$38.00	\$62.30	\$120.00
Prolonged (more than 40 mins)	\$220	\$61.00	\$91.70	\$176.00

For Pensioners, Veterans Affairs and Health Care Card Holders, we do generally offer a discounted fee, but for the above reasons, do not bulk-bill patients. Accounts may be taken to Medicare and rebates claimed. If you have any queries regarding these billing arrangements please discuss with your doctor at the time of your consultation. The good news is the new Medicare Plus Package gives rebates of up to 80% of the out of pocket expenses once you have reached the threshold. There may be a small charge for telephone prescriptions and the completion of insurance forms. Generally payment is expected at the time of consultation.