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**REF-FUNDED RESEARCH LINKS BODY COMPOSITION TO RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS
DISABILITY**

ATLANTA, GA (May 1, 2009) A study recently published in *Arthritis Care & Research* concluded that body composition, particularly the amount of fat and lean mass located in the arms and legs, is strongly associated with disability in rheumatoid arthritis patients.

Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic disease that causes pain, stiffness, swelling, and limitation in the motion and function of multiple joints. Though joints are the principal body parts affected by RA, inflammation can develop in other organs as well. An estimated 1.3 million Americans have RA, and the disease typically affects women twice as often as men.

Jon T. Giles, MD, of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and recent recipient of the ACR Research and Education Foundation's Clinical Investigator Fellowship Award, and his colleagues measured the total and regional body fat and lean mass in 197 patients with RA—118 female and 79 male—by using a total body dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry scanner. Then, using the Health Assessment Questionnaire to measure disability and controlling for sociodemographic, lifestyle, and disease-related risk factors, they associated the measures of fat and lean mass with disability for the total group and by sex.

The project found that increased fat and decreased lean mass strongly correlated with depression, pain, RA duration, duration of morning stiffness, Disease Activity Score in 28 joints, radiographic damage scores, levels of physical and sedentary activities, and body composition.

“In this investigation, which is the first to our knowledge to explore relationships between body composition and physical functioning in patients with RA, we observed increasing disability—as measured by the HAQ—with increasing fat and decreasing lean masses, with appendicular fat and lean masses demonstrating the greatest magnitude of effect,” the authors write about the project.

The report continues, “Understanding this is important because body composition is potentially modifiable, and interventions promoting healthy body composition in patients with RA may offer promise in attenuating RA-related disability and improving quality of life.”

About ACR Research and Education Foundation

The ACR Research and Education Foundation was established in 1985 as a 501(c)(3) with a mission to improve patients' lives through support of research and training that advances the prevention, treatment and cure of rheumatic diseases. Since its founding, the REF has promoted and advanced the field of rheumatology by funding research, training and education opportunities for clinicians, students, health professionals, researchers and academic institutions. On average, 90 cents of every dollar donated to the REF is used to fund its extensive award and grant program.