

EULAR 2018

Inflammatory or rheumatoid arthritis patients' perspectives on the effect of arthritis gloves on their hand pain and function (A-GLOVES TRIAL): a qualitative study

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Ann Rheum Dis, volume 77, supplement Suppl, year 2018, page A1866

Background: Arthritis (compression) gloves are frequently provided to people with inflammatory (IA) or rheumatoid arthritis (RA) in the NHS, to help reduce swelling and alleviate hand pain by providing compression and improving circulation. However evidence for their effectiveness is limited.¹

Objectives: Nested within a randomised controlled trial (RCT) testing the effectiveness of intervention (compression) gloves with control gloves (fitted at least one size too big) in people with RA and IA, this qualitative study aimed to explore patients' perspectives on the effect of the arthritis gloves on their hand pain and function.

Methods: Once randomised, participants were provided joint protection and hand exercise booklets and fitted with either the intervention or the control glove(s) by a trained occupational therapist.² Both gloves had similar thermal qualities but control gloves did not apply compression. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants, purposively selected from each group (n=20) following 12 weeks of glove wear. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed by three researchers using thematic analysis with a critical realist perspective.

Results: Participants' perspectives on the effects of the arthritis gloves had three emergent sub-themes. These were¹ Usage: both groups predominantly used the gloves for activities such as wearing them outdoors to keep hands warm, night-time wear to help with sleep, and doing light domestic activities (e.g. dusting). Gloves were not used for cooking or washing-up or for personal activities of daily living (e.g. toileting, grooming) "*What didn't help as such, obviously was with washing etc. and toileting because I had to keep taking them off and putting them back on again*";² Symptomatology: while some reported that gloves helped to keep their "*hand pain in check*" others said that gloves had no effect on their hand pain or that they'd found "*it's made them worse*". Participants from both groups frequently mentioned the warmth element of the gloves, as a positive attribute to help with their symptoms;³ Aesthetics: participants had opposing views on the appearance of the arthritis gloves. Some felt that the intervention gloves "*look a bit ugly with the seams outside*" or stated that they "*would not want to wear that colour*" but did not think they were obtrusive. Most noticeably, patients seemed to view the arthritis gloves as ordinary everyday gloves, rather than a medical device "*if it was cold I wore them outside*".

Conclusions: Trial participants reported experiencing similar effects from wearing either the intervention or control gloves, with varied perspectives on whether or not gloves affected hand pain and/or function. Overall, patients did not reflect on the compressive but rather the thermal qualities of the gloves, as warmth was the main effect perceived.

References

1. Hammond, et al. Clin Rehabil 2016 30:213–24
2. Prior, et al. Rheum 2017(Suppl)

Acknowledgements: This project was funded by the NIHR Research for Patient Benefit Programme (PB-PG-0214–33010). The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health.

Disclosure of Interest: None declared

DOI: 10.1136/annrheumdis-2018-eular.5980

Citation: Ann Rheum Dis, volume 77, supplement Suppl, year 2018, page A1866
Session: HPR Patients' perspectives, functioning and health (descriptive: qualitative or quantitative)