

Comorbidities

- Risk factors for diseases are different for each polio survivor
- Polio survivors may be more at risk of various diseases due to decreased activity and weight gain
- Polio survivors have more hospital stays than others of the same age and gender

Some of the health issues you experience are the direct result of polio or the Late Effects of Polio. You can read about these on [Polio Australia's Health webpage](#). Other health concerns that occur alongside polio or the Late Effects of Polio, but are not directly related, are known as 'comorbidities'. Discussing your overall health with your general practitioner and allied health team helps you to identify and manage any health risk factors.

Please note: this fact sheet talks only about 'risk'. It does not mean there is a direct cause-effect relationship between polio history and disease. Regular and thorough health screening is important, as is managing the risk factors you have control over.

Cardiovascular and Coronary Heart Disease/High Blood Pressure

Many polio survivors have two or more [risk factors for heart disease](#). This might be due to:

- not being active
- confusion about the safety of exercise
- age
- being overweight
- diet
- diabetes
- high cholesterol*
- depression

**Read more about Statins used to manage cholesterol in Polio Australia's [Medications fact sheet](#)*

Lung, Heart And Digestive System Diseases

[Various studies](#) indicate there may be more lung, heart and digestive system diseases among polio survivors. Those at risk may have had a more severe case of poliomyelitis, had breathing problems and a weakened diaphragm from polio, and contracted the disease when they were less than 5 years old.

Weight Gain, Overweight and Obesity

Weight gain can increase your risk of heart disease. Obesity can also lead to obstructive sleep apnoea, restrictive lung disease, diabetes, and osteoarthritis in hips and knees. You can read more about managing your weight in Polio Australia's [Nutrition fact sheet](#).

Diabetes Type 2

Diabetes Type 2 can be the result of factors such as decreased activity and weight gain. More information on symptoms and managing Diabetes Type 2 can be found on the [Diabetes Australia](#) website.

Skin Breakdown/Pressure Sores

Pressure sores occur as a result of prolonged sitting, sleeping in one position, or poorly fitted orthoses. Skin can become thinner and more fragile as we age, which increases the risk. See your general practitioner immediately to ensure the wound doesn't become infected.

Hip and Limb Fractures Due to Falls

Many polio survivors have weakened muscles which can lead to problems with balance. This increases the risk of falls and the possibility of hip and limb fractures. You can read more in Polio Australia's [Falls Prevention fact sheet](#).

Joint Problems

Often the limb seemingly unaffected by polio does more work to compensate for weakness. This increases general "wear and tear" on joints and can lead to: osteoarthritis, tendonitis, tendon tears, and bursitis. For example, a person who uses a crutch, cane or wheelchair relies on their arms. Often this can result in damage to cartilage, tendons and ligaments in the wrists, elbows and shoulders. You can read more in Polio Australia's [Bone and Joint Health fact sheet](#).

Hospitalisation

Research has shown that polio survivors have more hospital stays than others of the same age and gender. Polio survivors who are expecting a future hospital stay can read more in Polio Services Victoria's [Anaesthesia and Surgery guide](#).

Headaches

Headaches may be a result of chronic overuse, unusual use or abnormal position of the neck. This may be helped with physiotherapy.

Headaches, especially upon awakening, can be from inadequate ventilation (breathing) overnight due to respiratory muscle weakness and/or sleep apnoea. A general practitioner referral for a sleep test may be recommended.

Nerve Compression

Nerve compression can occur from pressure on the heel of the hand through use of crutches, canes or a manual wheelchair. This can lead to carpal tunnel syndrome. Other nerves may also be compressed by unusual joint positions. Symptoms of nerve compression are numbness, tingling or "electric shock" sensation. Your general practitioner may recommend surgery to release the trapped nerve.

Mental and Social Wellbeing

Some polio survivors may experience post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This may be from childhood hospitalisations, being away from family or bullying. Polio survivors may feel isolated, frustrated or depressed because of their condition. You can read more in Polio Australia's [Emotions fact sheet](#).

Parkinson's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis and Female Breast Cancer

[Studies on Danish patients](#) who previously had polio, reported increased risk of Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and female breast cancer.

More Information

Speak to your general practitioner or rehabilitation physician about any health concerns

Much of the information on this fact sheet has been taken from *What Having Had Polio Causes, Might Cause and Does Not Cause* by Marny K. Eulberg, MD.

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