

MANAGING YOUR ARTHRITIS

LIVING WELL WITH ARTHRITIS



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WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

Arthritis is the most common cause of pain and disability in the UK and can affect people of all ages, not just older people.

The word “arthritis” means ‘inflammation in the joints’. Inflammation is a difficult thing to imagine and describe, but it is part of the body’s normal healing process, just like the healing of a cut or a bruise. Inflammation can be thought of as being like a bruise with swelling on the inside of the joints, and this can cause pain and stiffness.

There are many different types of arthritis, the most common ones are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Other types of arthritis include gout, psoriatic arthritis and spondyloarthritis.

There is no one cause but different factors may be linked including genetics, gender, age, injury, infections and lifestyle.

Symptoms of arthritis include pain, swelling, inflammation, tenderness or stiffness in joints. You may feel some restricted movement around the joints, and skin over the affected joints may appear to be red. Muscles can feel weak as well and some people report feeling aches or burning sensations.

ARTHRITIS ACTION

Arthritis Action is the UK charity giving hands-on, practical help to improve the quality of life of people living with arthritis.

We support people living with arthritis to better manage their condition. We do this by offering information and support on:

- healthy eating and weight management
- mental wellbeing
- exercise
- pain management techniques

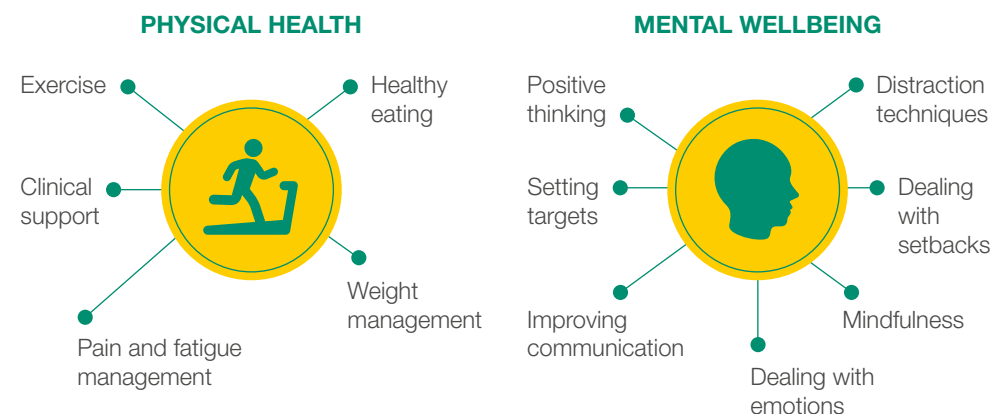
In addition, we give people access to mental health resources and other helpful advice on managing their mental wellbeing. We run Online Groups which

give people an opportunity to share their experiences and tips on managing their condition. We also organise Open Clinics and Self-Management Events for the public to come and meet us to find out how we can help them.

Resources on our website are available for everyone. However, our membership scheme offers additional services, including nutritional and weight management consultations, subsidised clinical appointments, and Arthritis Action Connect, a telephone support service.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Self-management means looking after your:



INFORMATION

It is an old saying but it is true – “information is power”. Sometimes we are just fearful because we do not know things. Arthritis Action offers a range of information and resources so you can feel more in control of your condition.

Our website includes:

- Diet and nutritional information including recipes
- An Exercise and Activity Directory to find local exercise sessions and activities
- A Mental Health Directory to find local services to support your mental wellbeing
- Factsheets on a range of topics including pacing, gadgets and aids for arthritis
- Webinars and podcasts on topics such as pain management, diet, podiatry and surgery

You can also find a wealth of personal stories of other people like you living with arthritis, to inspire and motivate you.

Hints and Tips

Groups: we run Online Groups to give you an opportunity to talk to people who also live with arthritis so you can share tips and experiences.

Arthritis Action Connect: if you join as a Member and prefer to talk to people on a one-to-one basis then this is the service for you. Our volunteers will chat to you on the phone to help answer any queries you have.



DIET AND NUTRITION

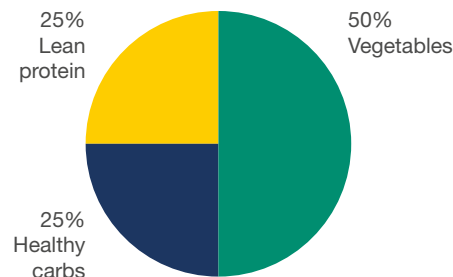
If you have been diagnosed with arthritis, eating healthy, nutritionally balanced meals, preferably based on the Mediterranean diet, could help your condition.

The Mediterranean diet is based on foods eaten in countries like France, Spain, Greece and Italy. It includes plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds and healthy fats like olive oil.

Research has shown that the Mediterranean diet can help with weight loss and help prevent heart attacks, strokes and type two diabetes. For this reason, Dietitians often recommend this diet to help people improve their health.

This way of healthy eating helps with weight management so that you can avoid putting too much pressure on your joints. Each pound of lost weight relieves four pounds of pressure on joints.

Studies have shown that foods in the Mediterranean diet are full of antioxidants that are anti-inflammatory, which may help people living with arthritis. For instance, olive oil and different coloured fruit and vegetables, including squash, carrots, tomatoes, broccoli, peppers, blackberries, and melons are all good choices.



Our Members can take advantage of nutritional and weight management consultations with our registered Dietitian. Our website features a selection of tasty recipes which you can try out for yourself.

When making changes to your diet it is good to seek the advice of your GP or a registered Dietitian.

Alcohol, such as a small glass of wine (125 ml) as part of a meal, is enjoyable in moderation. If you have gout, please pay attention to how much beer you drink to avoid recurrent gout attacks. If you are taking any medication, it is a good idea to speak to your doctor about how these medicines may interact with alcohol.



PAIN MANAGEMENT

There are many ways to help manage pain and often this will depend on whether you are experiencing long or short term symptoms.

This can include:

- Prescription or non-prescription medicines
- Rest and relaxation until flare ups subside, including meditation and mindfulness techniques
- Improving sleep patterns can often reduce pain levels
- Applying cold packs to an area of inflammation can be helpful in the first few days of a joint flaring up
- Applying something warm to muscles can sometimes help with stiff or painful muscles
- Compression – using lightweight, stretchy tubular bandages can assist in supporting joints such as the knees and elbows
- Elevation – raising legs or hips where pain exists can help, especially in the evening

- Gentle exercise, however minimal, will help your pain in the long term and moving in water can sometimes be a good starting point
- Strengthening the muscles around a joint can be very effective in reducing the pain in a joint
- Use of a Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS) machine can often be useful in helping in the short term management of pain, visit the NHS website to find out more about TENS: www.nhs.uk/conditions/transcutaneous-electrical-nerve-stimulation-tens/
- Hands-on therapy with an Osteopath or Physiotherapist is often helpful

Pain is a very individual thing and what works for one person may not work for another. It can also impact on your relationships and mental health. Learning how to manage flare ups and understanding what can increase your pain is important. Over time you will find the best pain management methods for you.

Some people find that using distraction techniques takes their mind off pain.

DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES

- Breathing
- Muscle relaxation
- Positive thinking
- Meditation and guided imagery
- Mindfulness
- Hobbies such as gardening



PLANNING AND PACING

- You will experience good and bad days when living with arthritis
- You might find yourself doing too much on your good days and then feeling tired or in pain the next day
- Pacing can help you to break this cycle by setting yourself small but achievable goals, even on your good days
- Building up slowly helps to increase your energy and reduce stress levels as you become more aware of what your body is able to do
- This also applies to exercise – build a small amount of exercise into your daily routine
- Make a list and prioritise essential things that you need to do
- Include short rest periods within your day
- Plan ahead and organise as much as possible when you feel well, but do not overdo things
- Ask for help when you need it and let people know how arthritis impacts your energy levels
- Use our Setting Goals section to help you write a realistic and manageable to-do list



Photo credit: Centre for Ageing Better

STAYING ACTIVE

Exercising can help you stay mobile for longer, improve your flexibility and coordination and increase energy. Exercise helps to release feel good chemicals in your brain like serotonin and endorphins, so your mental health also benefits. As part of a healthy lifestyle, in combination with eating nutritious food, exercise can help with weight management and reducing the physical load on our joints.

There are four different forms of exercise:

AEROBIC

This is also known as endurance activities. If you find going upstairs leaves you out of breath, then you need to take up more aerobic exercise to help strengthen your heart, lungs and circulatory system.

Anything that gets you slightly out of breath is aerobic exercise and often includes activities such as jogging, walking, swimming, dancing, water aerobics or other exercise classes.

STRENGTH TRAINING

As we age, we lose muscle mass and strength training helps to build it back. Strengthening the muscle around our joints is good for protecting against joint injuries and reducing pain in the lower back and joints. It is also great for improving balance and helping to avoid trips or falls. Maintaining strong muscles will also lead to stronger bones and guard against osteoporosis as we age.

Our immune function will also be protected if we get stronger using strength training. Skeletal muscle moves us, helps with managing pain, acts to absorb inflammation in our bodies and responds well to infections.

This kind of exercise is also known as resistance training. You can use light stretchy elastic bands, exercise equipment or household objects. You can also use your own body weight, for instance, doing press ups or standing up from sitting.

STRETCHING

Stretching helps to maintain flexibility and increases your range of motion. Ageing leads to loss of flexibility in muscles and tendons, so there is an increased risk of muscle cramps, joint pain and muscle stiffness, making it harder to bend and move. Regular stretching helps to maintain muscle flexibility and prevent joint pain so you can continue to move more freely.

BALANCE

Tai Chi, also known as ‘moving meditation’ and yoga are great examples of balance-based exercise. As we get older our sense of balance breaks down and this kind of exercise can help you to maintain your sense of balance and reduce the risk of falls. Balance-based exercise includes squats and leg lifts to help strengthen leg muscles.

EXERCISE TIPS

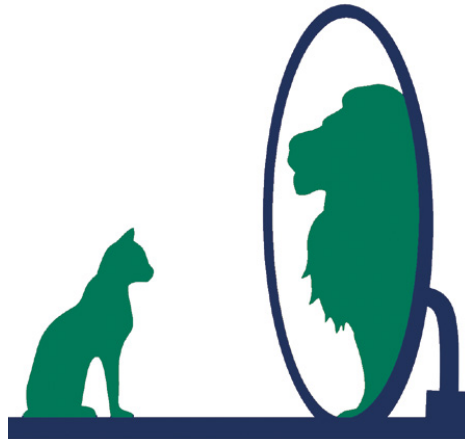
Before embarking on any new exercise plan do consult with your doctor or registered health professional to ensure that the type of exercise you are considering is suitable for you. Start slowly and make sure that you warm up properly and cool down at the end of each exercise session. Drink water regularly to stay hydrated, especially if exercise is making you sweat.

Our website has a range of great chair-based exercises which you can try at home to help you get started. The Exercise and Activity Directory on our website helps people living with arthritis to find more information about exercise and activity opportunities available in their area.



POSITIVE THINKING

Positive thinking is a very helpful tool in managing your arthritis. Let negative thoughts drift away and focus on positive thoughts. This may help to reduce your anxiety and stress levels. Our minds are powerful. If we frequently think we cannot do something, our brain will continue to look for the negative and keep repeating this cycle.



What you can do:

- Shift your mind focus: begin to focus on what it feels like when things are good
- Have confidence in yourself: remember your achievements and all the times that you have done well

As you practise this more and more, the negative voice in your head may become quieter. Your mindset will become more positive, and your body will feel more relaxed.

Sometimes emotions can cloud our rational thinking, so we need to take a step back and train our brain to think in a more positive and logical way.

When we feel anxious, irrational thoughts can enter our minds and drive out reasonable thinking. Try and ask yourself why you are having these thoughts. Relax and re-focus the thoughts that are at the forefront of your mind.

A few things can help you to do this:

- ✓ Write down your thoughts to help clarify your thinking
- ✓ Practise positive thinking
- ✓ Focus on possible solutions to unhelpful thoughts
- ✓ Try it out in real life situations to see how positive thoughts can help your wellbeing
- ✓ Do not give up, keep practising

MENTAL WELLBEING

Being diagnosed with arthritis can seem a little overwhelming at first. You may feel anxious about your future mobility and independence. Some people say that when they were first diagnosed, they felt quite frustrated and isolated.



These feelings are understandable as our mental wellbeing can often reflect how we feel physically. However, there is a great deal of support available, and Arthritis Action provides services and resources which can help you to manage your condition.

There are several ways in which you can improve your mental wellbeing, such as meditation, mindfulness and talking therapies. Taking regular exercise, healthy eating, drinking in moderation, staying active and maintaining a positive outlook are all beneficial.

If you feel you need help and do not know how to take the first step, you can visit our website, and find our Mental Health Directory. The services listed include the NHS, charitable organisations, and local directories. This will help you to find mental health services in your region so you can get the right support for you.



THERAPIES FOR ARTHRITIS

OSTEOPATHY

Osteopaths use hands-on manipulation and stretching to increase the mobility of the joints and encourage the optimum environment for joint health.

PHYSIOTHERAPY

Physiotherapists help people to improve their movement and function through advice and education, manual therapy, and exercises and stretches.

ACUPUNCTURE

Western acupuncture involves the insertion of fine needles using current knowledge of healthcare, anatomy and physiology to stimulate the nervous system.

MASSAGE THERAPY

There are many different types from deep tissue massage to very gentle. It can help with relaxation and stress relief.

ALWAYS

- Do your research and make sure that the practitioners you find are qualified and registered
- Tell them about your condition before appointments

COMMUNICATING YOUR NEEDS – BE EMPOWERED

Living with arthritis may mean that at times you feel frustrated or angry. It might be harder to speak with healthcare professionals due to these emotions and struggling with understanding medical language.

We can offer some strategies to help you in these situations.

- Before medical appointments ask yourself what you want to know from the professional you are meeting. What are your concerns and needs? Make a list of what you want to say and take it with you to your appointment so you do not forget anything.
- If it would help you, ask someone you trust to come with you to the appointment. They can offer reassurance and support you with expressing your needs and feelings.
- If emotions overwhelm you, practise some calming techniques before the

appointment and leave plenty of time to get there so your stress levels do not rise.

- At the beginning of the appointment explain to the healthcare professional how you feel and state your concerns. This will help them to better understand your situation. Ask them to keep medical explanations as clear and simple as possible. Perhaps they can give you some leaflets to take away to read later.

If you feel that you do not understand, ask for clarification, and present your questions in a calm manner. Remember, it is their job to help you so you do not need to feel afraid to ask for assistance.



RELATIONSHIPS

Living with arthritis can impact on your relationships with family and friends. Caring for children or grandchildren while experiencing flare ups can be difficult. Going out for drinks with friends can seem hard when you are unable to drink because of medication.

There are lots of ways to manage relationships and situations. Communicate with others, explain your condition, feelings and needs, and let people join you on your journey in self-managing your arthritis.

COMMUNICATION

Let people know how you are feeling and the impact that arthritis may be having on your physical and mental health. Explain to them that you may need to do things in a different way and require their patience and understanding.

COPING STRATEGIES

If you care for young children and experience a flare up, keep lively children busy with less active indoor activities such as crafting or storytelling.

While your friends enjoy their glasses of wine, you can sip a mocktail or two. Alternatively, suggest another activity to enjoy together that is easier for you.

If you know that you have a busy day coming up, such as a big family celebration, rest up and pace yourself beforehand.

SUPPORTED SELF-MANAGEMENT

Do not be afraid to ask for support, we all need help from time to time. Let people know when you might need assistance and what they can do for you. Can someone pick up your shopping for you or help you with online shopping? Would you like someone to come with you to medical appointments? Perhaps you just want to talk to someone about how you are feeling? Find the practical, physical, and emotional support you need.

BE EMPOWERED – USE ‘I STATEMENTS’

The importance of an ‘I Statement’ is that it allows you to calmly and clearly express to others how you are feeling.

Examples:

- I feel worried if I don't understand...
- I get upset when I have to keep asking...
- I could really do with some help as I don't feel too good...
- I feel anxious when...

WORK

If you are applying for a new job, you are only legally bound to tell an employer about your condition after you have been offered the role. Employers are only allowed to ask you about your health before making a job offer if it is relevant to the job. For instance, parcel delivery would require some physical strength and dexterity, so a prospective employer, in this instance, may ask you about your health and fitness.

There may be days when you experience flare ups, and it impacts your work. Talk to your manager, HR, or Occupational Health department to find out what support options are available.

These options could include:

- Flexible working hours
- Adjustments to working patterns (breaks, altering working periods, earlier or later starts)
- Working from home
- Adaptive equipment such as special keyboards, chairs, desks, or voice software for computers
- Moving to a different role
- Altering your current role

You are legally entitled to have your employer make reasonable adjustments for you. You will need to explain your condition and outline how these adjustments can help you to remain effective at work. These adjustments depend on your job and how arthritis affects you.

Most adjustments do not involve big expenses. However, if you do need more expensive equipment your employer can find out about funding from government schemes.





Photo credit: Centre for Ageing Better

TRAVEL PLANNING

PLAN AHEAD

- Plan breaks into your journey
- Check how many stops there will be along the way
- When possible, travel at quieter times of the day if you are worried about navigating crowds
- Let others know if you need any help
- Ensure you are able to move your luggage around or have somebody to help you
- Find out in advance what assistance and facilities are available at airports and train, coach and bus stations, such as step free stations
- Book seats before travelling so you can rest
- Ask somebody to travel with you
- Rest the day before the journey
- Discover if you are eligible for a Blue Badge or travel concessions

MONEY

DISABILITY BENEFITS

People with physical or mental health conditions may qualify for financial help and benefits. You may be eligible for financial help from the government. Disability benefits are based on what you can and cannot do, so focus on that in your application rather than the condition you have.

EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE (ESA)

You can apply for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), if you have a disability or health condition that affects your ability to work. This can help you with living costs or support to get back into work if you are able to.

PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE PAYMENT (PIP)

PIP can help with extra living costs if you have both of these:

- A long-term physical or mental health condition or disability, and
- Difficulty doing certain everyday tasks or getting around because of your condition

There are two parts to PIP: daily living and mobility. Whether you get one or both parts, and how much you will get, depends on your level of difficulty.

ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE

Attendance Allowance helps with extra costs if you have a disability severe enough that you need someone to help look after you. You do not have to have someone caring for you to make a claim. If you do have a carer, they could get Carer's Allowance if you have substantial caring needs.

If you are over State Pension age, you can apply for Attendance Allowance if you meet certain criteria. Attendance Allowance is paid at two different rates depending on how much care you need because of your disability. You could get extra Pension Credit, Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction if you get Attendance Allowance.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT

You can apply for Universal Credit if you are on a low income, out of work or you are unable to work. Your circumstances will be taken into account to assess how much payment you will receive. The eligibility rules can be complicated, and you need to be aged 18 or over and be under State Pension age to apply.

Other benefits:

- Carer's Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance for Children (who have difficulties walking)
- Transport – including Blue Badges, vehicle tax discount or exemption, Motability Schemes to lease vehicles or wheelchairs
- Council Tax discount
- Discounted local bus travel

Visit our website for the latest information: www.arthritisaction.org.uk/arthritis-and-disability-benefits

It can be helpful to speak to Citizens Advice (www.citizensadvice.org.uk), an independent organisation which specialises in helping people deal with legal, debt, housing, and other issues in the UK.

Please note: this information is correct at time of printing (February 2023). Government schemes may change.

SETTING GOALS

It is important to set goals to help you take control of your condition and progress in living an active daily life. We offer individualised support using our **Personalised Member Pathway** which helps each person to realise their goals. Our membership team, Exercise Lead and registered Dietitian can help you to identify and achieve goals that are important to you.

Goals may include:

- Walking a little further each day
- Adopting a healthier diet
- Managing pain
- Coping with feelings like frustration
- Being more confident about speaking to healthcare professionals
- Taking up distraction techniques
- Learning to pace yourself



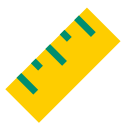
SMART GOALS

You can find your own ways of managing your symptoms and pain, rather than letting them control you. It is important once you decide on your goals to make sure that they are SMART, so you can achieve them more easily.

The best way is to use SMART Goals:



SPECIFIC



MEASURABLE



ACHIEVABLE



REALISTIC



TIME BOUND

HOW WE HELP

Resources on our website are available for everyone - www.arthritisaction.org.uk. You may wish to join our Membership scheme which offers the following benefits:



Nutritional and weight management consultations with a registered Dietitian



Two subsidised appointments with an Osteopath or Physiotherapist



Priority booking on all Arthritis Action's Groups and Events



Individualised support using our Personalised Member Pathway



Two issues of our Members' magazine



An invitation to the Annual General Meeting and Conference



Volunteer-led Arthritis Action Connect telephone service



Online Exercise Classes to help you regain muscle strength

JOIN NOW AT:

www.arthritisaction.org.uk/join-us/member-registration

Thank you to our supporters!



The Hospital
Saturday Fund



COMMUNITY
FUND

Contact us for more information:

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