



Living well with a musculoskeletal condition

- When you're diagnosed with a musculoskeletal condition such as arthritis, fibromyalgia, osteoporosis and back pain you may feel overwhelmed and worried about your health
- There are many things you can do to take control and live a full, healthy life
- The first step is learning all you can about your condition

The following tips will help you understand your condition, make informed decisions and live well with a musculoskeletal condition.

Links to peak organisations that can provide more specific help for your situation are provided at the end. Links for other useful resources are provided throughout this information sheet.

Learn about your condition

Ask questions, including:

- what condition do I have
- what are the symptoms
- how is it diagnosed
- what can I expect in the future
- what treatments are available
- what are the ways I can manage it?

The more you know about your condition, the more control you will have.

Musculoskeletal Australia: Conditions
www.msk.org.au/learn-about-your-condition

Work with your healthcare team

There's a large range of health professionals who can work with you to manage your condition. You may see them on an ongoing basis, or you may visit them from time to time as needed.

Find out which medical and other health professionals will be helpful in managing your condition. Work with your healthcare team to select the best treatment options that suit your lifestyle and health needs.

Musculoskeletal Australia: Healthcare team
www.msk.org.au/healthcare-team

Understand your treatment options

Discover the variety of treatment options including medication, exercise and massage that can help manage the pain and stiffness that you experience, as well as treatments that may slow the development of your condition. Know the options available, and discuss with your healthcare team whether they're right for you.

Arthritis Foundation USA: Arthritis treatment options
www.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/treatments

Explore different types of physical activity

Regular physical activity benefits everyone, and it can help to reduce pain, strengthen muscles and maintain joint function. It can also improve the fitness of our heart and lungs, increase bone strength, reduce body weight, improve your sleep, energy levels and mental wellbeing.

Talk with your doctor, a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist for more information and advice tailored specifically to your unique situation.

Musculoskeletal Australia: Exercise
www.msk.org.au/exercise

Arthritis Foundation USA: Exercises for arthritis
www.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/exercise

American College of Rheumatology: Exercise and arthritis
www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver/Diseases-Conditions/Living-Well-with-Rheumatic-Disease/Exercise-and-Arthritis



Learn how you can make healthy food choices

There's little evidence that particular foods are good or bad for people with musculoskeletal conditions. And there's no diet proven to cure these conditions.

But eating a healthy, well-balanced diet is important. It will help you maintain a healthy weight and reduce the load on your joints. Eating well will also help protect you against other health conditions. For bone health - whether you have osteoporosis, or to protect against getting it - it's important that your diet includes the necessary amount of calcium for your age and gender.

Talk with your doctor or dietitian for more information and advice.

Musculoskeletal Australia: Diet
www.msk.org.au/diet

Eat for Health - Australian Dietary Guidelines
www.eatforhealth.gov.au

Versus Arthritis: Diet and arthritis
www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/managing-symptoms/diet

Identify effective pain management techniques

There is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to pain management. Not all pain management techniques will suit every situation or every person. Identify a range of strategies that you find effective so that you have a collection to choose from to suit particular situations, such as ice packs to reduce swelling, medicines for pain relief, relaxation techniques to ease tense muscles.

There are many options available to help you manage and live with pain. Talk to your healthcare team for more advice.

Musculoskeletal Australia: Managing your pain
www.msk.org.au/pain-guide

National Prescribing Service: Chronic pain explained
www.nps.org.au/medical-info/consumer-info/chronic-pain-explained

Manage your fatigue

Recognise that there may be times when you experience periods of mental and physical tiredness, or fatigue. This fatigue can make every day activities seem overwhelming. Fatigue may be caused by lack of sleep, pain, medications, depression or the condition itself. There are many things you can do to help combat this fatigue including exercise, pacing your activities through the day, getting a good night's sleep and talking with your doctor about your medications.

Versus Arthritis UK: Managing fatigue
www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/managing-symptoms/managing-fatigue

Better Health Channel: Fatigue
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/fatigue

Recognise the emotional challenges

Recognise and acknowledge the emotional challenges that come with managing your condition. It's natural for you to feel a range of emotions, including fear, stress, depression and frustration, when living with a chronic condition. It's important that you acknowledge these feelings. You may want to talk with a counsellor or psychologist, write in a journal, talk with a family member or close friend. Don't ignore these feelings

Arthritis Foundation USA: Arthritis and Emotions
www.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/life-stages/coping-with-change/emotions-and-feelings.php

Research complementary and alternative treatments

If you're interested in complementary and alternative treatments, do your research. These treatments include things such as acupuncture, massage, herbal medicines and aromatherapy. Some treatments can be useful in helping you manage your condition, while others will have no effect. And some have side effects or may interact with your other treatments. It's important to check the qualifications of the person providing the treatment and to talk to your healthcare team about whether it's right for you.

Musculoskeletal Australia: Complementary and alternative treatments
www.msk.org.au/complementary-treatments

Versus Arthritis UK: Complementary and alternative treatments
www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/complementary-and-alternative-treatments

Get a good night's sleep

It can be difficult when you live with painful musculoskeletal conditions to get a good night's sleep. Pain, muscle tension, stress and other factors can interfere with your sleep. Not getting enough good quality sleep can impact on the pain and muscle tension you experience. This can become a vicious cycle. If you're experiencing difficulties with sleep, there are many things you can do. Start by talking with your doctor. Call our Help Line and speak with our nurses. Borrow sleep resources from your local library.

Musculoskeletal Australia: Sleep
www.msk.org.au/sleep

Versus Arthritis UK: Sleep

www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/managing-symptoms/sleep

Working with a chronic condition

Working is good for your health and wellbeing, but sometimes your condition may interfere with your work. Musculoskeletal conditions can be unpredictable – you can be fine one day but having a ‘flare up’ the next. This unpredictability can be stressful. Talk to your doctor or allied healthcare professional about ways to help you stay at work.

There are many things you can do to enable you to continue working such as pain management techniques (e.g. mindfulness), medication, modifying the workspace, using aids and equipment (e.g. modified mouse and keyboard, lumbar supports) and having some flexibility with the hours worked.

Arthritis Foundation USA: Finding a job and working with arthritis

www.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/life-stages/work/workforce-ready.php

Versus Arthritis UK: Work

www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/living-with-arthritis/work

Arthritis Ireland: Work and arthritis

<https://www.arthritisireland.ie/work-and-arthritis>

Find aids to assist with daily activities

Sometimes tasks we take for granted may be affected by our condition. For example, if you have arthritis in your hands you may find turning a tap becomes difficult. Or if you have back pain you may find reaching down to tie your shoes exacerbates your pain.

This impact on the ability to do everyday activities can be upsetting and may affect your feeling of independence.

The good news is there’s a large range of aids and equipment available to help you with activities of daily living. Items available include aids to help with cooking, cleaning, bathing, writing, mobility, technology and driving. The items needed will vary greatly from person to person, so it’s a good idea to talk to an occupational therapist and have an individual assessment.

Musculoskeletal Australia: Making life easier

www.msk.org.au/making-life-easier

Have a support team

Family and friends can help support you physically and emotionally with the day to day ups and downs of living with a chronic condition. It’s important that you’re honest with them so they can provide the support you need – don’t be afraid to ask for help.

As well as support from family and friends, you may be interested in joining a peer support group. Meeting with people who know what you’re going through, who have similar conditions and experiences, can be extremely beneficial.

Musculoskeletal Australia has many peer support groups. Most of these groups meet face to face, but there are several that you can access via websites or social media. Why not reach out to one today?

Musculoskeletal Australia: Peer Support Groups

www.msk.org.au/peer-support-groups

Keep a diary or journal

It can be helpful to keep a diary recording the changes in your condition, the effectiveness of medications you’re taking, how you feel physically and mentally, the quality of your sleep, and your pain and fatigue levels. This information can help you when you visit your doctor – especially if there’s some time between your appointments. It provides an accurate reflection of how you’ve been, rather than trying to recall the information when you’re sitting in your doctor’s office.

To get started, you can use an ordinary notebook to write this information down. Or there are many apps and templates you can download and use. Some are free, however some do have a fee to access them.

Let’s talk about sex

Relationships and intimacy are an important part of life. At times the physical and emotional symptoms of your condition may put pressure on your relationships and your sex life. There are things you can do to prevent this from happening. Being open and honest with your partner about how you feel - both physically and emotionally - is the first step.

Versus Arthritis UK: Sex, relationships and arthritis

www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/living-with-arthritis/sex-and-relationships

American College of Rheumatology: Sex and arthritis

www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver/Diseases-Conditions/Living-Well-with-Rheumatic-Disease/Sex-Arthritis

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Musculoskeletal Australia
www.msk.org.au
MSK Help Line: 1800 263 265

How we can help

Call our MSK Help Line and speak to our nurses.
Phone 1800 263 265 or email helpline@msk.org.au.

We can help you find out more about:

- arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions
- ways to live well with these conditions
- managing your pain
- upcoming webinars, seminars and other events.

More to explore

- Versus Arthritis UK www.versusarthritis.org
- Australian Physiotherapy Association
www.physiotherapy.asn.au
- Australian Rheumatology Association
<https://rheumatology.org.au>
- Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- Beyondblue
www.beyondblue.org.au
- Dietitians Association of Australia
<http://daa.asn.au>
- Exercise and Sports Science Australia
www.essa.org.au
- MedlinePlus USA
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus
- National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health USA
<https://nccih.nih.gov>
- NHS Choices UK
www.nhs.uk
- Occupational Therapy Australia
www.otaus.com.au
- Pain Australia
www.painaustralia.org.au
- painHEALTH
www.painhealth.csse.uwa.edu.au
- Sleep Health Foundation
www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au

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