



Your guide to Health professionals

One of the best things you can do to manage your musculoskeletal condition (e.g. [arthritis](#), [back pain](#), [fibromyalgia](#), [ankylosing spondylitis](#)) is to have a reliable, supportive team around you.

You're at the heart of the team. You know how your body is feeling, the symptoms you're experiencing and the problems you're having.

Playing a supporting role in your team are your family and friends, support groups and health professionals.

It's important to understand how various health professionals can help you.

General practitioner (GP)

Your GP is an essential partner in the management of your condition. They're central to your care and can help you manage day-to-day and access other health professionals and services.

They're likely to be the health professional you see most often for managing your musculoskeletal condition and any other health problems you may have.

The rest of your team

A range of health professionals can work with you to manage your condition. You may see them on an ongoing basis or only when you need them.

This is a brief summary of some of the more common health professionals that may be part of your team.

Specialists. Your GP may refer you to a specialist if you're experiencing complications relating to your condition or if they feel an expert opinion will ensure you're receiving the best possible care.

- rheumatologist - a doctor who specialises in diagnosing and treating problems of the joints, immune system and bones (e.g. [rheumatoid arthritis](#))
- endocrinologist - a doctor who specialises in diagnosing and treating problems of the endocrine system (e.g. [diabetes](#), [osteoporosis](#))
- orthopaedic surgeon - a surgeon who specialises in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of disorders of the bones, joints, ligaments, tendons and muscles



- others – you may be referred to other specialists occasionally, depending on your musculoskeletal condition and other health conditions. They may include:
 - cardiologist (heart, circulatory system)
 - dermatologist (skin)
 - nephrologist (kidneys)
 - gastroenterologist (stomach, intestines, oesophagus, liver, gallbladder, appendix, pancreas)
 - ophthalmologist (eyes),.

Rheumatology nurse – carry out various clinical activities including, patient education and counselling, monitoring disease progression and coordinating other aspects of care.

Physiotherapist - use physical means (e.g. exercise, massage, heat and cold) as well as education and advice to help keep you moving and functioning as well as possible. Physios can also show you pain relief techniques and design an individualised exercise program.

Exercise physiologist - helps improve your health and fitness through exercise programs tailored to your specific needs as well as providing support to live a healthy lifestyle. Also known as an EP.

Occupational therapist - helps you learn better ways to do everyday activities such as bathing, dressing, cooking, working, eating or driving. They can also provide information on aids and equipment to make everyday jobs easier. Also known as an OT.

Dietitian - can provide information and advice on food and nutrition. They can develop a healthy eating plan for you and help ensure your diet's as healthy as possible.

Pharmacist – can help you with information and advice about prescription and over-the-counter medicines.

Podiatrist - assess, diagnose and treat foot and lower limb problems. This includes skin and nail problems, foot and ankle injuries, foot problems related to health conditions and problems with walking. They can also provide advice about appropriate footwear.

Psychologist - can help you work through your feelings, particularly if you're anxious or depressed. They can also help you set goals (e.g. lose weight and keep it off, exercise more) and work through any problems that may prevent you from achieving your goals.

Hand therapist - an occupational therapist or physiotherapist with extra training to treat conditions relating to your hands, wrists and elbows.

Accessing healthcare professionals

To see a specialist, you'll need a referral from your GP. You'll then be able to make an appointment to see them in their rooms within a public hospital, private clinic, or private hospital.

You can access allied health professionals in a number of settings, including:

- public hospitals and outpatient clinics
- community health centres
- community rehabilitation services.

Some private healthcare providers may need a referral from a GP. Private health insurance extras may cover some of the costs.



Chronic Disease Management Plans

These plans are a proactive way for you and your GP to manage your chronic, complex or terminal conditions. They provide subsidised access to health professionals such as physios or dietitians to help you reach your goals, for example, becoming more active. Eligible people receive five visits per calendar year. Talk with your GP to see if you're eligible for a [Chronic Disease Management Plan](#).

There's a similar scheme specifically for mental health conditions. [Mental health treatment plans](#) provide eligible people ten visits to a mental health professional per calendar year. Talk with your doctor for more information and to see if you're eligible for a mental health treatment plan.

Preparing for your appointments

You'll get the most out of your appointments if you're prepared:

- write down your questions
- ask the most important questions first
- consider making a longer appointment if you have a lot of questions - that way, you can get through all of your questions without having to rush
- consider taking someone with you.

How can Musculoskeletal Australia help?

Our nurses are available for you to speak with about arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions, pain or any other musculoskeletal issues you have. You can contact them on weekdays between 9am-5pm. Phone 1800 263 265 or email helpline@msk.org.au. We also have a range of services – including free webinars – you can access on our [website](#).

More to explore

- [Australian Hand Therapy Association](#)
- [Australian Orthopaedic Association](#)
- [Australian Physiotherapy Association](#)
- [Australian Podiatry Association](#)
- [Australian Psychological Society](#)
- [Australian Rheumatology Association](#)
- [Dietitians Association of Australia](#)
- [Endocrine Society of Australia](#)
- [Exercise and Sports Science Australia](#)
- [Occupational Therapy Australia](#)

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