



Living well with a musculoskeletal condition

Musculoskeletal conditions affect the muscles, bones and/or joints. There are over 150 types, including [osteoarthritis](#), [back pain](#), [rheumatoid arthritis](#), [fibromyalgia](#), [gout](#), [polymyalgia rheumatica](#), [lupus](#), [osteoporosis](#) and [ankylosing spondylitis](#).

Anyone can get a musculoskeletal condition, including [children](#). They affect people from all backgrounds and lifestyles.

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

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

Learn about your condition

Understanding your condition allows you to make informed decisions about your healthcare and actively manage it. Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't understand something or want more information. Ask questions such as:

- What condition do I have? Some musculoskeletal conditions have similar sounding or complex names. Ask your doctor or specialist to write it down if you're concerned about remembering it.
- Are there other symptoms I should be aware of?
- What treatments are available? Including self-care, lifestyle changes and medical care.
- How will I know if the treatment is working? How long does it take before I notice it working?
- What are the side effects of medicines you're prescribing?
- What are the ways I can manage it?
- What can I expect in the future?

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

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

Work with your healthcare 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.

Your GP is central to your care and can help you manage day-to-day and access other health professionals and services such as specialists and allied health professionals. 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 medicine, exercise, mindfulness, and massage that can help manage the pain and stiffness 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* <https://www.arthritis.org/treatments>
- *Versus Arthritis: Treatments* <https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/treatments>

Explore different types of physical activity

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

Talk with your doctor, a physiotherapist or an exercise physiologist for more information and advice tailored 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* <https://rheumatology.org/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: Eating well with arthritis* www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/managing-symptoms/diet

Identify effective pain management techniques

There is no 'one size fits all' in pain management. Not all pain management techniques will suit every situation or every person. That's why it's important you identify a range of strategies you find effective to suit particular situations, such as ice packs to reduce swelling, medicines for pain relief, and 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 - An A-Z guide* 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

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, medicines, depression or the condition itself. You can do many things 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 medicines.

- *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: Managing emotions and arthritis* www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/healthy-living/emotional-well-being/emotional-self-care/managing-emotions-and-arthritis

Do your research when it comes to complementary and alternative treatments

If you're interested in complementary and alternative treatments like acupuncture, massage, herbal medicines, or homeopathy, it's essential that you first do your research. Some treatments can be helpful, while others will have no effect. And some have side effects or may interact with your other treatments. Always check the qualifications of the person providing the treatment and talk to your doctor 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

Getting a good night's sleep can sometimes be challenging when you live with a musculoskeletal condition. Pain, muscle tension, stress and other factors can interfere with your sleep. Not getting enough good quality sleep can worsen the pain and muscle tension you experience. 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 have a flare the next. This unpredictability can be stressful.

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



Talk to your doctor or allied healthcare professional about ways to help you stay at work.

- *Musculoskeletal Australia: WorkWise - Working with a musculoskeletal condition*
www.msk.org.au/workwise
- *Arthritis Foundation USA: Entering or Re-entering the Workforce with Arthritis Limitations*
www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/healthy-living/daily-living/work-life-balance/entering-workforce-arthritis
- *Versus Arthritis UK: Work* www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/living-with-arthritis/work

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 difficult. Or if you have back pain, you may find reaching down to tie your shoes painful.

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: Aids and equipment* www.msk.org.au/making-life-easier

Have a support team

Family and friends can help support you physically and emotionally with the daily ups and downs of living with a chronic condition. Be open and honest with them so they can support you. And 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. Groups meet in person, online and through social media. The

- *Musculoskeletal Australia: Peer Support Groups* www.msk.org.au/peer-support-groups

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 - 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* <https://rheumatology.org/sex-and-arthritis>



Q. Where can I get more help?

A. Many people and support organisations can help you manage your musculoskeletal condition. They include:

- Your doctor
- Musculoskeletal Australia | msk.org.au | Arthritis and Back Pain+ Help Line: 1800 263 265

Q. How can Musculoskeletal Australia help?

A. 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](https://msk.org.au).

More to explore

- 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
- Versus Arthritis UK www.versusarthritis.org

If you found this information useful, help us help others by [donating today](#).

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