

# UNDERSTANDING ARTHRITIS:

INFORMATION, FACTS,  
SYMPTOMS AND  
SUPPORT AVAILABLE

**JEWISH CARE**

## UNDERSTANDING ARTHRITIS

Arthritis is a common condition that causes pain and inflammation in a joint. In the UK, around 10 million people have arthritis. It affects people of all ages, including children. The two most common types of arthritis are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

### OSTEOARTHRITIS

Osteoarthritis affects around 8 million people in the UK, generally those who are over 50 years of age. However, it can occur at any age as a result of an injury or another joint-related condition. Osteoarthritis initially affects the smooth cartilage lining of the joint. This makes movement more difficult than usual, leading to pain and stiffness. The cartilage lining of the joint can then become thin and tissues within the joint can become more active. This can then lead to swelling and the formation of bony spurs, called osteophytes. In osteoarthritis, the cartilage (connective tissue) between the bones gradually erodes, causing bones in the joints to rub together. The joints that are most commonly affected are those in the hands, spine, knees and hips.

### RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

Rheumatoid arthritis affects more than 400,000 people in the UK. It often starts when a person is between 40 and 50 years old. Women are three times more likely to be affected than men. Rheumatoid arthritis occurs when the body's immune system targets affected joints, which leads to pain and swelling. The outer covering (synovium) of the joint is the first place affected. This can then spread across the joint, leading to further swelling and a change in the joint's shape. This can cause the bone and cartilage to break down. People with rheumatoid arthritis can also develop problems with other tissues and organs in their body.

## OTHER TYPES OF ARTHRITIS AND RELATED CONDITIONS

- **Ankylosing spondylitis** – a long-term inflammatory condition that mainly affects the bones, muscles and ligaments of the spine, leading to stiffness. Other problems can include the swelling of tendons, eyes and large joints.
- **Cervical spondylosis** – also known as degenerative osteoarthritis, cervical spondylitis affects the joints and bones in the neck, which can lead to pain and stiffness.
- **Fibromyalgia** – causes pain in the body's muscles, ligaments and tendons.
- **Lupus** – an autoimmune condition that can affect many different organs and the body's tissues.
- **Gout** – a type of arthritis caused by too much uric acid in the body. This can be left in joints (usually affecting the big toe) but can develop in any joint. It causes intense pain and swelling.
- **Psoriatic arthritis** – an inflammatory joint condition that can affect people with psoriasis
- **Enteropathic arthritis** – a form of chronic, inflammatory arthritis associated with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), the two best-known types being ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. About 1 in 5 people with Crohn's or ulcerative colitis will develop enteropathic arthritis. The most common areas affected by inflammation are the peripheral (limb) joints and the spine.
- **Reactive arthritis** – this can cause inflammation of the joints, eyes and urethra (the tube that urine passes through). It develops shortly after an infection of the bowel, genital tract or, less frequently, after a throat infection.
- **Secondary arthritis** – a type of arthritis that can develop after a joint injury and sometimes occurs many years afterwards.
- **Polymyalgia rheumatica** – a condition that affects people over 50 years of age, where the immune system causes muscle pain, stiffness and joint inflammation.

## SYMPTOMS OF ARTHRITIS

The symptoms of arthritis you experience will vary depending on the type you have. This is why it's important to receive an accurate diagnosis if you have:

- joint pain, tenderness and stiffness
- inflammation in and around the joints
- restricted movement of the joints
- warm, red skin over the affected joint
- weakness and muscle wasting

## TREATING ARTHRITIS

There's no cure for arthritis, but there are many treatments that can help slow down the condition.

For osteoarthritis, painkillers, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and corticosteroids are often prescribed. In severe cases, the following surgical procedures may be recommended:

- arthroplasty (joint replacement)
- arthrodesis (joint fusion)
- osteotomy (where a bone is cut and re-aligned)

In treating rheumatoid arthritis, the aim is to slow down the condition's progress and minimise damage to the joints. Recommended treatments include:

- analgesics (painkillers)
- disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)
- physiotherapy
- regular exercise

## LIVING WITH ARTHRITIS

Living with arthritis can mean that simple, everyday tasks are painful and difficult. However, there are many things you can do to make sure you live a healthy lifestyle.

### HEALTHY EATING AND HEALTHY WEIGHT

It's very important to eat a healthy, balanced diet if you have arthritis. Eating healthily will give you all the nutrients you need and help you maintain a healthy weight. If you're overweight, losing weight can help considerably. Too much weight places excess pressure on the joints in your hips, knees, ankles and feet, leading to increased pain and mobility problems.

### EXERCISE

If your arthritis is painful, you may not feel like exercising. However, being active can help reduce and prevent pain. Regular exercise can also:

- **improve your range of movement and joint mobility**
- **increase muscle strength**
- **reduce stiffness**
- **boost your energy**

## JOINT CARE

If you have arthritis, it's important to look after your joints so that there is no further damage. For example, try to reduce the stress on your joints while carrying out everyday tasks like moving and lifting. Some tips for protecting your joints, particularly if you have arthritis, include:

- **use larger, stronger joints as levers** – for example, take the pressure of opening a heavy door on your shoulder rather than on your hand
- **use several joints to spread the weight of an object** – for example, use both hands to carry your shopping or distribute the weight evenly in a shoulder bag or rucksack
- **don't grip too tightly** – grip as loosely as possible or use a padded handle to widen your grip
- **It's also important to avoid sitting in the same position for long periods of time and to take regular breaks so you can move around.**

## AT HOME

If you have arthritis, carrying out tasks around the home can be a challenge. However, making some practical changes to your home and changing the way you work should make things easier.

You can find more useful information and advice about living independently by contacting Arthritis Care or the Disabled Living Foundation, contact details for these organisations are at the end of this leaflet.

An occupational therapist can also help if you have severe arthritis that's affecting your ability to manage at work, move around your home or carry out everyday tasks, such as cooking and cleaning. They can advise about equipment you may need to help you live independently. Depending on the exact nature of your condition, your GP may be able to refer you to an NHS occupational therapist. However, you may need to access this type of therapy through your local council.

## **NEED MORE INFORMATION, SUPPORT OR ADVICE?**

### **JEWISH CARE'S HELPLINE**

A free confidential helpline that can provide advice and information about support on offer either from Jewish Care or other local service providers.

Telephone: 020 8922 2222

Email: [helpline@jcare.org](mailto:helpline@jcare.org)

Website: [www.jewishcare.org](http://www.jewishcare.org)

### **ARTHRITIS CARE**

Information, guidance and practical support to help you stay active and independent

Helpline open from 10am - 4pm weekdays: 0808 800 4050

(closed on the last Friday of every month).

Email: [helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk](mailto:helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk)

Website: [www.arthritiscare.org.uk](http://www.arthritiscare.org.uk)

### **ARTHRITIS RESEARCH UK**

Information about arthritis and research.

Telephone: 0300 790 0400

Fax: 0300 790 0401

Email: [enquiries@arthritisresearchuk.org](mailto:enquiries@arthritisresearchuk.org)

Website: [www.arthritisresearchuk.org](http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org)

### **NATIONAL RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS SOCIETY**

Helpline, information, local groups and peer support.

Telephone: 0800 298 7650

Email: [helpline@nras.org.uk](mailto:helpline@nras.org.uk)

Website: [www.nras.org.uk](http://www.nras.org.uk)

### **RICA**

Consumer research and guidance on products for the elderly and people living with disabilities.

Telephone: 020 7427 2460

Email: [mail@rica.org.uk](mailto:mail@rica.org.uk)

Website: [www.rica.org.uk](http://www.rica.org.uk)

## **DISABLED LIVING FOUNDATION**

National charity providing impartial advice and information about products to help with independent living.

**Helpline: 0300 999 0004**

**Email: [helpline@dlf.org.uk](mailto:helpline@dlf.org.uk)**

**Website: [www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)**

## **HEALTH TALK ONLINE**

Free, reliable information about health issues by sharing people's real-life experiences. You can watch people sharing their stories about living with a range of health conditions and disabilities including Arthritis.

**Website: [www.healthtalk.org](http://www.healthtalk.org)**

## **NHS CHOICES**

**Website: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)**

**Please contact 020 8922 2450  
if you require this information in  
larger print or an alternative format.**

**JEWISH CARE**

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