

Disability Insight

Take a look around you

Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Conditions 29th March 2017

Key points

- Musculoskeletal conditions are the single biggest cause of disability and pain across the UK.
- They affect more than 10 million adults and around 15,000 children in the UK.
- They account for 21% of GP visits in the UK.
- Each year in the UK, 30.6 million working days are lost as a result.
- Arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions can affect all parts of the body in different ways. Many of these conditions cause pain. Often, people also experience a loss of mobility and dexterity.

1 About arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions

Musculoskeletal conditions are disorders of the bones, joints, muscles and spine. They can have many different causes, including injuries, inflammatory diseases, and ageing, for example. Musculoskeletal conditions can interfere with people's ability to carry out their normal activities. Common symptoms include pain, stiffness and a loss of mobility and dexterity.

Arthritis is a common musculoskeletal condition that causes pain and inflammation in one or multiple joints. Arthritis is not a single disease. There are over 200 different types of arthritis, the most common being osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. While arthritis is often associated with older people, it can also affect children and young people.

Supported by BSO Equality Unit

2 How do arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions affect someone's life?

The impact of arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions on an individual can occasionally be severe. They have the potential to limit a person's activity and ability to carry out day to day functions, such as climbing stairs or lifting things. Many people who live with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions speak of the pain they experience, some on a constant basis. Other impacts can include fatigue and a range of side effects of medication, such as weight gain.

Listening to people who live with arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions reveals that many have to make major changes in their lives. For some, for example, it means giving up sports they had engaged in for a long time and having to find new ways of keeping active. For others, their condition compromises their independent living.

Impacts on a person's ability to carry out their work are common. More than one third of people with arthritis or other musculoskeletal conditions are unable to work permanently; many others experience several employment restrictions.

The symptoms and potential impact of arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions can in turn affect a person's mental health and wellbeing.

It has been reported that people with musculoskeletal problems are more likely to experience stress, anxiety and depression. According to Arthritis Research UK two-thirds of people with osteoarthritis, the most common form of arthritis, report symptoms of depression when their pain is at its worst. Depression is four times more common for those people in persistent pain than those without.

Some people point to the social isolation they experience as a result of being restricted in their mobility and activities and from being off from work for extended periods of time. A lack of understanding by managers and colleagues of what it is like to live with constant pain can also contribute to a feeling of isolation. Other people living with musculoskeletal conditions speak of their fears when their pain is at its worst, worrying whether the pain will ever go away

To read and listen to people tell their own story of living with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions click on any of the links below:

<https://www.arthritiscare.org.uk/our-services-and-support/stories>

<http://www.nras.org.uk/stories>

You can get further information on how arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions affect people through any of the websites listed at the end of this document.

3 Supporting someone with arthritis or other musculoskeletal conditions in work

Musculoskeletal conditions can impact on daily work life in different ways. Some people find it difficult to type and write, they might have difficulty sleeping and therefore experience fatigue, or be slow to lift and carry things.

As a line manager you might need to make reasonable adjustments to help your employees. You should speak to the individual and see if there is anything they can't do, or are restricted in doing, for example standing or sitting for extended periods. You should work closely with the individual, Occupational Health and Human Resources colleagues to look at any adjustments, which could include, for example:

- Putting in place specialist equipment or make adjustments to equipment like chairs and IT equipment.
- Offering regular breaks to help combat tiredness and help with attention.
- Reallocating duties.
- Considering flexible working or rearranged work hours.

4 Support for you if you care for somebody with arthritis or other musculoskeletal condition

Looking after and caring for a person with arthritis or other musculoskeletal conditions can be a challenge. Most people like to stay as independent as possible, so carers often report that they need to work out when it's a good time to offer help and when it's a good time to stand back.

As a carer, you can avail of a range of flexible working policies, designed to support you in balancing your work and caring responsibilities. Letting your manager know will make it easier for them to support you.

A range of voluntary sector organisations provide advice and support to carers, including CarersNI <http://www.carersuk.org/northernireland>

5. Support for you if you have arthritis or a musculoskeletal condition

Many of you may already be managing your arthritis or musculoskeletal condition through regular exercise and medication. More information on managing your condition can also be found through various charitable organisations, some of which are listed below.

Sources and further reading

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Arthritis/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<https://arthritiscare.org.uk/>

<http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/>

<http://www.nras.org.uk/>

<http://www.csp.org.uk/your-health/conditions/osteoarthritis>

<http://arma.uk.net/>

<http://wellbeing.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/toolkits/musculoskeletal-health-toolkit-employers>



Northern Ireland
Blood Transfusion Service

Northern Ireland
Social Care Council

Patient and Client Council
Your voice in health and social care

NIPEC

The Regulation and
Quality Improvement
Authority

Northern Ireland
mdta
Medical & Dental Training Agency

NIGALA
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency
a voice for children

SBNI
Safeguarding Board
for Northern Ireland

HSC Public Health
Agency

HSC Business Services
Organisation

HSC Health and Social
Care Board