



Healthcare team

- There are many health professionals who can help you manage your condition
- It's important to understand their specific roles and what they can do for you

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.

Understanding how different health professionals can help you at different times is vital.

General practitioner (GP)

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

They're likely to be the health professional you see most often – both for managing your condition, as well as any other health problems you may have.



The rest of your team

There are a range of health professionals who 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. You may from time to time need to see a specialist. Your GP may refer you to a rheumatologist or an endocrinologist if you're experiencing complications relating to your condition, or if they feel an expert eye 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. osteoporosis).
- others – you may be referred to other specialists from time to time, depending on the type of musculoskeletal condition you have and other health conditions. They may include: nephrologist (kidneys), dermatologist (skin), gastroenterologist (stomach, intestines, and the oesophagus, liver, gallbladder, appendix, pancreas), ophthalmologist (eyes), cardiologist (heart, circulatory system).

Rheumatology nurses – carry out a range of clinical activities including patient education and counselling, as well as 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 individual exercise program for you.

Exercise physiologist - help to 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 medications – both prescription and over-the-counter.

Podiatrist - assess, diagnose and treat foot and lower limb problems, such as 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 feeling anxious or depressed. They can also help you set goals (e.g. lose 5kgs, exercise more) and work through any problems that may prevent you achieving your goals.

Hand therapist - an occupational therapist or physiotherapist who has extra training and can help you in the treatment of conditions relating to your hands, wrists and elbows.

Accessing healthcare professionals

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

- GP Chronic Disease Management Plan – talk to your GP to see if you're eligible for a GP Management Plan. You may be eligible for 5 visits in a calendar year with an allied health professional. The plan covers most of the cost of the visit although out of pocket expenses may vary
- public hospital and outpatient clinics
- community health centres
- community rehabilitation services
- private healthcare providers may need a referral from a GP. Private health insurance extras may cover some of the costs.

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.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Musculoskeletal Australia
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

- Australian Hand Therapy Association
www.ahta.com.au
- Australian Physiotherapy Association
www.physiotherapy.asn.au
- Australian Podiatry Association
www.apodc.com.au
- Australian Psychological Society
www.psychology.org.au
- Australian Rheumatology Association
<http://rheumatology.org.au>
- Dietitians Association of Australia
www.daa.asn.au
- Endocrine Society of Australia
www.endocrinesociety.org.au
- Exercise and Sports Science Australia
www.essa.org.au
- Occupational Therapy Australia
www.otaus.com.au

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