

Inflammatory Arthritis and Work:

support with employment

Being diagnosed with a form of inflammatory arthritis (IA) can be an overwhelming event, but recent advances in treatment and care mean that you should be able to maintain an active life and, if of working age, keep working as long as you want. In addition to financial benefits, staying in work can help your self-esteem and wellbeing.¹ There are steps that you can take to make things easier. Your healthcare team, employer and voluntary sector organisations can help too. This document has been designed to help support you to manage your condition by bringing together helpful information for you and those around you so that you can stay in or return to work. See the following page for references, further information and resources.



Your multidisciplinary team (MDT) & work

- IA symptoms that can make work difficult include pain, stiffness, fatigue and problems with mobility or functioning caused by inflammation (swelling) and possible joint damage
- Members of your MDT may ask you whether IA is affecting your ability to work and should be able to direct you to further information and support
- Getting the right treatment from your consultant will help to manage these symptoms and get your condition under control
- Your clinical nurse specialist (CNS) may be in charge of coordinating your care and should answer questions about work and refer you to extra information and support if required
- Occupational therapists advise on practical changes to help you manage day-to-day and to stay in work. They can also liaise with your employer
- Your physiotherapist can give you exercises to help manage your symptoms at work
- You may need help from a psychologist or counsellor to learn to live with your diagnosis and the day-to-day changes that you might need to make. This service can be accessed via your rheumatology team, your GP and online
- The MDT may also sign-post you to voluntary organisations that can help with employment issues. There are some links in this document too
- You should have a care plan – if not ask for one – and this should include your goals for employment
- If you feel that you are unable to remain in work, do talk it through with members of your MDT or the relevant voluntary organisation, who will help you make a decision that is right for you

Telling your employer

- Although it might be daunting, telling your employer about your diagnosis can help manage expectations and any possible problems
- A letter from a member of your MDT might help your employer to understand your condition and support needs
- Larger companies often have a human resources department and occupational health practitioners who can help
- Smaller companies may not have this support in place so you will need to explain what your diagnosis means to your line manager initially and highlight potential modifications such as:
 - Workspace adaptations (eg a different chair)
 - Working different hours (eg starting and finishing later to accommodate early morning stiffness)
 - Allowances for your condition (eg having more breaks)
 - Equipment that may help you
 - A phased return or part-time working after being off sick
 - Making your job less pressurised
 - Sharing work with others when you are under pressure
- Your employer or GP may want to refer you to the Fit for Work programme for free advice. There is also a helpline if you have questions
- Other government programmes such as Access to Work grants can help to cover costs such as taxis to work if you can't use public transport or adaptations at your office to help you work

Ongoing management

- Once you are on the right treatment, your disease should be relatively stable, helping you to keep working. If you are still in pain and are experiencing fatigue, seek immediate help from your rheumatology team
- Keeping active and doing physiotherapy exercises can help manage your condition. Exercise won't worsen your arthritis, it can bring many benefits
- If you do have a flare-up that you cannot manage, seek help from your specialist team quickly. You may need to remind your employer that these fluctuations are a natural part of your condition
- If work is becoming more difficult, speak to your MDT and employer about whether further adaptations are needed to help you stay in work. Ask for an occupational therapy (clinic) or occupational health (at work) work assessment
- You may have access to some benefits to help financially if you are only able to work part time
- If you are changing jobs or want to return to work, there are national programmes that can help you
- If you do encounter problems with your employer, you are covered under the 2010 Equality Act against discrimination when applying for employment, during employment and when your employment is terminated. ACAS can help with this

Inflammatory Arthritis and Work:

further information

If you are interested in finding out more about inflammatory arthritis in the workplace, these resources may be of interest. They include documents published by the NHS, The National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society, Arthritis Research UK, The British Society for Rheumatology, The National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society, ACAS and the UK Government.

Your multidisciplinary team (MDT) & work

YOUR IA

- NRAS About Rheumatoid Arthritis: <http://www.nras.org.uk/about-ra>
- NASS About ankylosing spondylitis: <http://nass.co.uk/about-as/about-as/>
- NHS Choices (rheumatoid arthritis): <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
- NHS Choices (ankylosing spondylitis): <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/ankylosing-spondylitis/pages/introduction.aspx>
- NHS Choices (psoriatic arthritis): <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/psoriatic-arthritis/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
- NHS Choices (occupational therapy): <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/occupational-therapy/Pages/introduction.aspx>

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR MDT

- NRAS advice on talking to your MDT: <http://www.nras.org.uk/data/files/Publications/RAise%20It.pdf>

Telling your employer

FOR YOU

- NASS, Living well with AS - work: <http://nass.co.uk/about-as/living-well-with-as/work/>
- NRAS, I want to work: <http://www.nras.org.uk/data/files/Publications/I%20Want%20to%20Work.pdf>
- Arthritis Research UK, Work and arthritis: <http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/arthritis-and-daily-life/work-and-arthritis.aspx>
- British Society for Rheumatology – arthritis and work FAQs: http://www.rheumatology.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2015/a/arthritis_and_work.pdf

FOR YOUR EMPLOYER

- NRAS guide for employers: <http://www.nras.org.uk/data/files/Publications/When%20an%20Employee%20has%20Rheumatoid%20Arthritis.pdf>
- NASS guide for employers: <http://nass.co.uk/about-as/living-well-with-as/work/>
- Fit for work: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/458952/gp-fit-for-work-employers.pdf
- Fit for work helpline: **0800 032 6235**

Ongoing management

FOR YOU

- Job Centre Plus may have Disability Employment Advisers: <https://www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus>
- Careers advice service if you are considering a career change: <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>
- Higher education courses: <https://www.gov.uk/higher-education-courses-find-and-apply>
- Apprenticeships: <https://www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships>
- ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service): <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1461>
- NRAS Advice on benefits whilst working: <http://www.nras.org.uk/data/files/Publications/J6368%20Benefits%20and%20RA%20-%20May%202016%20AC%20review.pdf>
- NRAS How to Claim Personal Independence Payment: <http://www.nras.org.uk/data/files/Publications/How%20to%20claim%20PIP.pdf>
- Fit for Work Guidance for Employees: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/458950/gp-fit-for-work-employees.pdf
- Remploy: <http://www.remploy.co.uk/>

NATIONAL PROGRAMMES

- Access to work grants: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview>
- The Work Programme: <https://www.gov.uk/moving-from-benefits-to-work/job-search-programmes>
- Specialist employability support: <https://www.gov.uk/specialist-employability-support>
- Work Choice initiative: <https://www.gov.uk/work-choice>
- Personal Independent Payment: <https://www.gov.uk/pip/overview>

¹National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society, I want to work, 2007, page 8 available: <http://www.nras.org.uk/data/files/Publications/I%20Want%20to%20Work.pdf> accessed November 2016
The development of this guide was supported by the ABPI Rheumatology Initiative (ABPI RI).
The ABPI RI members are AbbVie Ltd, Bristol-Myers Squibb Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Chugai Pharma Europe Limited, Janssen, Merck Sharp & Dohme Ltd, Pfizer Ltd and UCB. This project is supported by BMS, Pfizer and UCB. Editorial control for the guide rests with members of the Employment and inflammatory arthritis working group.