

Ankylosing Spondylitis: The Unknown Spinal Arthritis

What is Ankylosing Spondylitis?

Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS) is a type of inflammatory, autoimmune arthritis that primarily affects the spine. It is characterised by intermittent pain and progressive stiffness due to the inflammation and eventual hardening of the ligaments that surround the spine.

The classic early symptoms of Ankylosing Spondylitis are pain and stiffness of the sacroiliac joints, the large joints connecting the pelvic bones to the sacrum in the lower back. In the final stages of the disease, the entire spine can become fused and rigid, often in a flexed, forward posture.

As this is an inflammatory disorder, many other systems and joints are often also affected. A significant number of people with AS also suffer from irritable bowel syndrome and inflammation of the eye.

What causes it?

The cause of Ankylosing Spondylitis is not clear, however, there are markers and predisposing factors that may contribute to the development of the condition. Genetics, chronic stress and frequent gastrointestinal infections are among the predisposing factors.

Men are affected more often than women and symptoms usually begin between the ages of 17 and 45 years.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Intermittent back pain and progressive stiffness are the two

most common symptoms of Ankylosing Spondylitis. Other tendons and ligaments may be affected, including those in the hands, feet and ribs.

Symptoms tend to be worse following periods of rest, particularly first thing in the morning and improve following periods of activity. It is common for people to experience “flare-ups” and “remissions” of symptoms.

Some people with Ankylosing Spondylitis may experience mild discomfort in the spine from time to time, while others may experience severe and debilitating symptoms at frequent intervals with minimal time in remission from symptoms.

Long term issues with AS include breathing difficulties due to thoracic and rib cage stiffness and severe spinal pain and immobility. Medical treatment focuses on reducing inflammation and slowing the disease process.

How can physiotherapy help?

Physiotherapy treatment aims to manage pain during flare-ups and maintain optimal posture as the disease progresses. Your physiotherapist will assess your spinal movement and posture as well as strength. If your hands, feet, hips or shoulders are affected, they will also provide you with specific exercises to help maintain mobility and strength in those joints.

Many studies have proven the positive benefits of exercise for those with Ankylosing Spondylitis, such as improved rib cage expansion when breathing and improved upper back and neck posture.

If you have any of the symptoms above, please [book](#) with your [local](#) physiotherapists who can assess and help you.

None of the information in this article is a replacement for

proper medical advice. Always see a medical professional for advice on your condition.

5 Reasons to Stay Active

The benefits of keeping active may seem obvious, yet it can't hurt to be reminded of the many ways exercise can improve your life. Here are 5 of our favourite reasons to get moving and stay active.

1. Exercise improves energy levels.

Improving your fitness means your body is capable of achieving more for the same energy expenditure. While doing exercise can make you tired in the short term, regular improvements to your fitness will help you get more out of your body each day.

2. Exercise can help to reduce stress.

If you are stuck in a state of stress or panic, exercise can help you move out of it into a calmer and more relaxed state, improving your mood, concentration and sleep.

3. Exercise and hobbies can help you build connections and community.

Making new friends as an adult can be surprisingly difficult and the importance of connection and community is being recognised more as being essential for overall wellbeing. Being part of a team, or club is a great way to build

confidence, meet friends as well as keeping active.

4. Exercise keeps your muscles, tendons, joints and bones healthy.

Our bodies are often compared to machinery or car parts. However, there are some crucial differences between our bodies and machines, including the fact that our bodies respond to exercise by becoming stronger and healthier, rather than being worn out. One of the best ways to prevent osteoporosis is through regular high impact activity, which stimulates bone growth.

5. Exercise can help to reduce injuries.

Similar to the previous point, tissues that are used regularly are stronger, more elastic and are less likely to tear or break when under stress. Regular exercise is the best way to keep your body in a healthy state and prevent injuries.

Finding the right exercise for you can be tricky, when you [book](#) with your [local](#) physiotherapists, they can help you with suggestions based on your ability and skillset.

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A Wrist Injury: Scaphoid Fractures

What is a Scaphoid Fracture?

The scaphoid is a small bone in the wrist that connects the radius to the hand, and it is situated near the thumb. Scaphoid fractures are a relatively common wrist injury and are commonly misdiagnosed as the pain can be quite mild even when the bone has been broken. Scaphoid fractures are notorious for their high incidence of complications healing due to low blood supply to the area and how easily their diagnosis can be missed.

How does it happen?

A scaphoid fracture is often caused by a fall on an outstretched hand or a direct blow to the wrist. It is more common in young adults than in children and the elderly.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of a broken scaphoid include wrist pain, swelling, bruising or discolouration of the skin over the injured area and difficulty moving the wrist or hand. As the swelling subsides you might notice pain at the base of the thumb when opening jars or gripping objects. There may also be a deep, dull ache in the wrist that doesn't settle easily.

How is it diagnosed?

If you suspect that you have a scaphoid fracture, you should consult your physiotherapist or GP who will refer you for an X-ray to confirm if the bone is broken. Occasionally scaphoid fractures will not show up on an X-ray, so if the findings are negative yet your medical team still suspect a fracture,

they may wait a week then X-ray again or send you for an MRI or CT to double-check. Though these fractures can often be treated without surgery, doctors may recommend surgical intervention for more severe cases.

How can physiotherapy help?

If you have a scaphoid fracture, your doctor will likely prescribe a splint or cast to ensure the wrist is kept still until healing is complete, usually for a minimum of six weeks. Healing times will vary depending on which part of the bone has been broken. Following the removal of the cast or splint, there is often residual pain, stiffness or muscle weakness. Your physiotherapist can help you restore any deficits as well as resolve any shoulder pain or headaches that may have resulted from altered biomechanics.

Contact your local [clinic](#) to make an [appointment](#) with one of our Physiotherapists to discuss your wrist pain and how physiotherapy can help.

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Why Do Tendon Injuries Take So Long To Heal?

If you've ever suffered from a tendon injury you will know that the recovery can be frustratingly long. Tendons are important tissues of the body, connecting muscles to bones and come in many different shapes and sizes. There are many

reasons why tendon injuries can be difficult to treat, as we explain below.

Tendon injuries often develop gradually

Tendons need to be able to transmit forces from muscles to the bones that they attach, however they respond to changes in strength more slowly than muscles do. As muscles become stronger or take on more load, the tendons can fail to keep up with this increased demand becoming painful and damaged. This process can take a while to occur and often changes to tendon tissue has begun long before the pain is noticed. This means that there are likely to be multiple factors to be assessed, including biomechanics and training regimes before the problem can be resolved.

Tendons have limited blood supply

Tendons do have their own blood supply, however, it is not as abundant as muscles. This can be a factor with healing, as all tissues require nutrients for health and to heal. Any condition that compromises circulation, such as diabetes, can predispose tendons to injury and delayed healing.

Rest and stretching may not necessarily help

Our instincts in response to tendon pain may not help with recovery. In some cases, stretching can aggravate symptoms and while rest may reduce symptoms, it will not necessarily help with recovery. The best evidence for promoting healthy tendon growth is through addressing poor biomechanics and a tailored strength and loading program.

Recovery often relies on adherence to a

specific rehab program

One of the biggest barriers to healing tendon pain is that exercises can be easy to do in theory, but hard to do in practice. They can take time and discipline. Your physiotherapist can also help you to find strategies to fit your exercises into your daily routine if you are finding this difficult.

Contact your local [clinic](#) to make an [appointment](#) with one of our Physiotherapists to discuss how you can help reduce and manage your tendon pain.

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5 Physio Tips for Better Running

Distance running can be a surprisingly complicated sport. In this article, we offer some words of wisdom from our physiotherapists to help you get the most out of your training and avoid injuries.

1) CHOOSE YOUR SHOES CAREFULLY

- Repeated stress from running long distances will show up any biomechanical flaws in your body relatively quickly. Choosing the wrong shoes can worsen an existing problem causing pain and injury. Your physiotherapist can guide you on what style of shoe will best suit you.

2) DON'T NEGLECT YOUR UPPER BODY

- While running can appear to be a purely leg based activity, increasing the strength and mobility of your upper body can have a surprisingly large impact on your posture, running style, breathing and overall performance.

3) FIND TIME TO TRAIN STRENGTH AS WELL AS ENDURANCE

- Your body is great at finding ways to compensate for weak muscles, however, overtime this can lead to overuse injuries of tendons and muscles. Identifying any areas of weakness early and specifically strengthening these muscles can both improve your running and help keep you injury-free.

4) PACE YOUR PROGRESS

- Entering an event is a great way to set a specific goal and keep you motivated. While trying to increase distances and speed, it is easy to forget to include rest days as a part of your routine. Your body needs time to recover and restore itself, just as much as the active portions of your training program. Increasing your speed and distances gradually also allows your body to adapt to new demands without breaking down.

5) ENJOY TRAINING AND LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

- Your body will guide you as to when you need to rest and

when you can push a little further. Training will be more enjoyable when you are well-rested and pain-free. Most importantly, if you are able to enjoy your runs, this will help you maintain motivation over a longer period of time, so you can continue for many years to come.

Contact your local [clinic](#) to make an [appointment](#) with one of our Physiotherapists to discuss how you can reach your running goals while staying injury-free.

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Foam Rolling

Alanna Hickey & [Jessica Smith](#), Rosebud's Physiotherapists, explain the benefits of foam rolling and give us some guidance on how to use the foam rollers.

Foam Rolling

What does foam rolling do?

Foam rolling works by placing direct and sweeping pressure on the soft tissue targeted. Foam rolling has shown to have short term benefits that result in increased joint range of movement, reductions in pain and severity of DOMS (delayed onset muscle soreness) (Cheatham, Kolber, Cain & Lee, 2015). Foam rolling has been shown to be particularly effective in the first 1-2 days following exercise (Pearcey, et. Al. 2015).

It is theorized that foam rolling helps to produce the above results by causing short term alterations to the neuromuscular system. However, the exact physiological mechanisms of foam rolling that cause the above results are yet to be clearly established (Cheatham, et al. 2015).

How to effectively foam roll?

Depending on the muscle group you are targeting, use the foam roller in a sweeping fashion along the length of the muscle. You can also friction over 'problem' or 'tight' areas. You may use a foam roller, spikey ball, trigger point ball or hand roller with this technique.

When to use foam rolling?

Foam rolling can be used before or after an event, for approximately 1-2 minutes per major muscle group (eg. hamstrings or quadriceps). Before an event, foam rolling should only play a small role in your active warm up. After an event foam rolling should be combined with an active cool down and then static stretching.

Still not sure what to do?

Contact one of our experienced friendly physiotherapists to help guide you with your injury prevention/conditioning and injury rehabilitation to let you reach your basketball goals!



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