

## ARTHRITIS FIGHT IT!

**To get the best results, you need to form close ties with your health-care team and become a full partner in your health-care treatment.**

**Learning daily living strategies to manage your arthritis gives you a greater feeling of control and a more positive outlook.**

*To support arthritis research or to learn more, contact The Arthritis Society:*



**1.800.321.1433**



**[www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca)**



**CAOT - ACE**

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists  
Association canadienne des ergothérapeutes

The Arthritis Society's  
**LIFESTYLE  
SERIES**



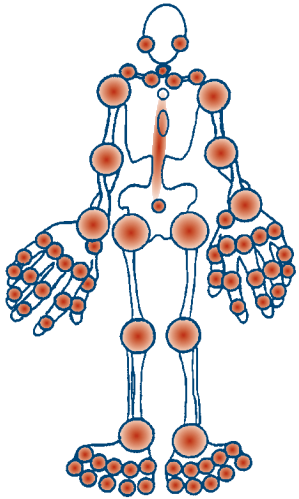
# Arthritis in the Workplace



## What is arthritis?

The word arthritis means inflammation of the joint (“arth” meaning joint and “itis” meaning inflammation). Inflammation is a medical term describing pain, stiffness, redness and swelling.

There are more than 100 types of arthritis. Some are caused by joint inflammation, while others are caused by joint degeneration. Arthritis is one of the leading causes of disability in Canada, affecting more than four million people of every age, physical condition and ethnic background.



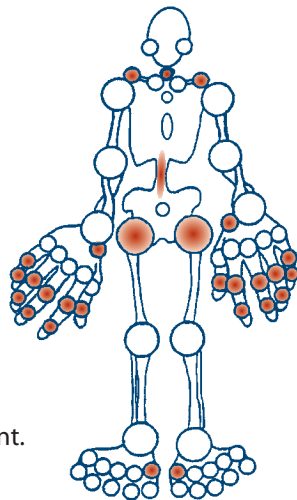
### Inflammatory arthritis

Inflammatory arthritis is an autoimmune disorder where an individual's own antibodies attack tissue in the lining of the joints and, sometimes, in other internal organs, causing inflammation, swelling and pain. Inflammatory arthritis can affect any joint and can start at any age, but often begins between the ages of 30 to 60 in both men and women. Inflammatory types of arthritis usually affect many joints in a symmetrical pattern, most often the small joints of the hands and feet, wrists,

elbows, shoulders, neck, spine, knees and hips. Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an example of this type of arthritis.

### Degenerative arthritis

Degenerative arthritis, also known as osteoarthritis (OA), occurs when cartilage (the tough spongy material that covers and protects the ends of bones) begins to wear away. Cartilage is an essential part of the joint; not only does it act as a shock absorber, it also enables the joint to move smoothly. Degenerative arthritis means that cartilage has eroded, eventually resulting in pain, stiffness, swelling and bone-on-bone movement in the affected joint.



This type of arthritis is more common as we age and affects one or two joints in an asymmetrical pattern, most often the joints in the hand, big toe, knee, hip, neck and lower back.

People with arthritis often find that their ability to perform daily tasks is limited due to the effects of the disease. Even buttoning a shirt or opening a door can be difficult as a result of pain and loss of flexibility. There is no cure for arthritis, but when you are diagnosed early and start the right treatment, you can take control of the disease and help reduce damage to your joints. Most people with arthritis can lead active and productive lives with the help of the right medication, exercise, rest and joint-protection techniques.

### Arthritis in the workplace

A common myth of arthritis is that it is a disease of the elderly. In fact, arthritis is one of the leading causes of disability in Canada. Of the more than four million Canadians affected by this disease, about 60 per cent are of working age (under 65). It's anticipated that more than seven million Canadians will be diagnosed with arthritis by 2031.



People with arthritis are affected at work regardless of their job – from those who work in offices or manufacturing plants, to people who work outdoors or in retail. Arthritis symptoms, such as pain and fatigue, can make it difficult to perform any job. Anxiety and frustration are common emotions. Even if you are confident that the demands of your job can be managed, you might worry how much longer this routine can be sustained. Or perhaps you feel you have to compensate for your disease by “going the extra mile.” According to a national study of arthritis in the workplace, many Canadians with arthritis are giving up breaks to complete tasks, sacrificing sick days and taking vacation time to rest at home in order to continue working.



## Managing arthritis in your workplace

Pain, fatigue, stiffness and limited joint movement are the hallmark symptoms of arthritis and can interfere with everyday activities. However, it's possible to make adjustments in your routine and develop strategies that allow for a more productive workday. There are a number of steps that can be taken by you and your employer to help manage the symptoms of your arthritis at work.

### Should I tell people at work about my arthritis?

Recent research of working Canadians with arthritis revealed that many want their arthritis to remain private, while others worry about how or when they should share this information with their employer or co-workers. The decision to share this information is ultimately up to you. The information in this booklet can help you choose whether to share your arthritis concerns at work or not.

### Assess your work environment

- Organize your work-space so that commonly used items are within reach.
- If you sit at a desk and use a computer, make sure your chair is within a comfortable distance from the computer and that your elbows are in a relaxed 90 degree angle to the keyboard.

- Use a chair mat to make it easy to slide or turn your chair.
- Try to stand square to your workstation so you're not bending or twisting.
- Use a step stool to reach for items on high shelves to reduce the strain from over-reaching and arching your lower back.
- If you have to stand for a long period of time, stand on rubber matting or anti-fatigue matting to relieve strain on the lower back and legs.
- Use knee pads when kneeling.
- Make sure the temperature in your work area is comfortable.
- Ask your employer if some door knobs can be replaced with levers.

### Plan ahead and pace yourself

- Work at a moderate, reasonable pace. You can still accomplish everything without draining your energy.
- If you know you have an important event coming up at work, make sure you rest at home before you need to use your energy.
- Perform important duties during the time you feel most energetic.
- Alternate duties to prevent strain on certain muscle groups/joints.
- Switch between standing, sitting and walking.
- Take breaks and get moving! It's a great idea to get out of your work environment for a break.
- If possible, work from home occasionally or arrange a reduced work schedule to better handle your fatigue.
- If you have access to flex-time at work (working different hours), use it if you find it helps. You might prefer working earlier or later in the day.

*Alternate duties to prevent strain on certain muscle groups/joints.*





### Maintain a good posture

- Sit in a proper upright, relaxed position. You should feel no strain on your back, neck or limbs.
- Sit so your hips, knees, ankles and elbows are at a 90 degree angle. Your shoulders and elbows should be in a relaxed position on an armrest (if this is appropriate for you).
- Your chair should be comfortable and provide good support for your thighs, buttocks and low/mid back. It should also be adjustable in height to allow for proper positioning with your workstation.
- Stand up and move every half-hour to hour, if possible.
- If you work at a computer, your eyes should be about 30 inches from the monitor. You should be looking straight ahead rather than up or down at the screen.
- Use a footrest if you work in a standing position or at a counter; it can decrease the pressure on your lower back.

### Be careful when moving or lifting

- Use a dolly or cart if you must move heavy objects as part of your job. This will reduce strain in your back, arms and legs.
- Try to roll or slide heavy objects, if possible.

- Take your time when moving objects; rushing could cause injury to your joints.
- Try asking a co-worker for assistance.
- Use a briefcase on wheels when taking work home or to a meeting.

### Pick appropriate footwear

- Wear comfortable footwear that supports your feet and promotes good posture.
- A properly sized shoe gives you space to wiggle your toes.
- Avoid wearing shoes with high heels.
- Use insoles to help decrease strain on your feet, legs and lower back.

### Apply ice and heat

- Apply ice during your lunch break or after work to reduce pain and decrease swelling. Use ice packs or a bag of frozen peas covered with a damp towel.
- Apply a heating pad to your lower back during the day or have a warm bath/shower after work to relax tight muscles and reduce persistent soreness.
- Use a towel to protect your skin and avoid using extreme heat or cold.

*Control your body weight and keep a healthy diet.*



### Take care of yourself

- Get the right amount of sleep every night.
- Balance your time at work with enjoyable leisure activities and quality time with friends and family.
- Maintain a regular routine of physical activity.
- Control your body weight and keep a healthy diet. Less weight ultimately means less pressure on your joints. Did you know that losing 10 pounds of excess weight reduces 40 pounds of pressure on your knees?
- Practise relaxation techniques – breathing, Tai Chi, yoga, etc.

## Solutions to assist you in the workplace

There are many comfortable, inexpensive and effective products designed to protect your joints from excess wear and tear. Before you consider using any of the suggestions below, please consult your health-care provider.

### Ergonomic aids

- If you use a computer, you may want to use a split keyboard so your hands, wrists and forearms are in a more natural position.
- Use a specially designed mouse called a trackball mouse, which reduces the amount of hand and arm movement.
- Use voice-activated software to reduce the amount of typing on a keyboard.
- Use an electric stapler or hole-puncher.
- Use a telephone headset to reduce the amount of neck side bending required to hold the phone receiver.
- Use a sit/stand stool.
- Use extended reachers to reach for items on the floor to cut down on kneeling or squatting.

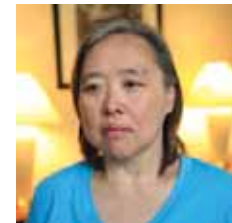
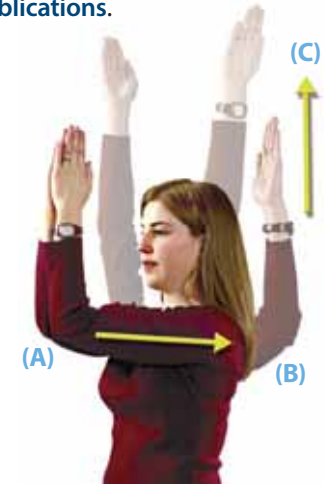


## Simple workplace exercises

Being physically active is an essential part of managing arthritis. The Arthritis Society has a collection of 10 exercises that can be done at work. A sample of these exercises is provided below; to download the full list, please visit [www.arthritis.ca/publications](http://www.arthritis.ca/publications).

### Shoulder Stretches

Sit or stand with forearms pressed together in front of the body (A). Then, bring your elbows back to the "hands up" position (B), with palms facing forward. Stretch arms overhead as far as possible, keeping your elbows in line with the sides of your body (C).



### Neck Turn

Slowly turn your head left so that you are looking over your left shoulder, then turn it right to look over your right shoulder. Finally, turn your head back to the centre.

### Finger Tuck

Hold one hand up pointing to the ceiling, fingers and knuckles straight.

Bend your fingers and tuck the tips down. Keep your knuckles straight, making sure they don't move. Stretch your fingers back up to their original position. Change sides.



## Useful Resources

When you live with daily pain, it can alter every aspect of your life. That is why The Arthritis Society offers a two-hour **Chronic Pain Management Workshop**. There, you will learn techniques to deal with joint and muscle pain, and how to manage stress and fatigue. Learn more at [www.arthritis.ca/cpmw](http://www.arthritis.ca/cpmw).

Enrol in the **Arthritis Self-Management Program (ASMP)**, a six-week program for people with arthritis, their family and friends. Trained leaders with first-hand experience of arthritis lead the weekly, interactive two-hour workshops. Program participants will gain self-confidence in their ability to control symptoms, learn how to develop action plans to manage their arthritis and make connections with others living with arthritis. Learn more at [www.arthritis.ca/asmp](http://www.arthritis.ca/asmp).

The Arthritis Society offers a number of free information brochures on various topics and specific types of arthritis. To receive your free copy, call the Arthritis Information Line at 1.800.321.1433 or download them at [www.arthritis.ca/publications](http://www.arthritis.ca/publications).



### Use Arthritis Friendly Products

The Arthritis Society is proud to be able to recognize manufacturers that have designed products that are easy to use for people living with arthritis. Products with the "Arthritis Friendly" logo have received an independent and favourable review. Please visit [www.arthritis.ca/arthritisfriendly](http://www.arthritis.ca/arthritisfriendly) for available products in Canada.

When your arthritis affects your ability to:

- take care of yourself,
- participate in paid or unpaid work, or
- enjoy your leisure time,

then you may want to learn *new skills for the job of living* from an occupational therapist. Learn more at [www.OTworks.ca](http://www.OTworks.ca).

## Ways you can Fight Arthritis

### Call The Arthritis Society

Our toll-free number can connect you with trained volunteers to provide you with support and information. **1.800.321.1433**

### Join the Free Arthritis Registry

You will receive specific information to manage your arthritis and improve your quality of life. [www.arthritis.ca/registry](http://www.arthritis.ca/registry)

### Healthy Joints in the Workplace

This presentation will demonstrate some of the simple tips and techniques that can be used to keep your joints healthy in the workplace. Employers and employees will benefit from learning about the impact of arthritis in the workplace and the importance of prevention and treatment. We will look at some of the simple things you can do to modify your work environment, pace and structure your day, and simple exercises that can be performed so that arthritis can be effectively managed throughout the working day. To learn more, please visit [www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca).

## Make a Donation

The Arthritis Society is fighting for a world without arthritis and helps people live their lives to the fullest by combating the limitations arthritis can impose daily. We trust that you found this information valuable and helpful as you battle arthritis. Please help us continue funding arthritis research, educational programming and services by making a donation today. To donate, visit us online at [www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca), call 1.800.321.1433 or cut out the form below and mail it to: **Attention: Data Services, The Arthritis Society, 393 University Avenue, Suite 1700, Toronto, ON M5G 1E6.**

I would like to help FIGHT ARTHRITIS by making a donation to The Arthritis Society.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Here is my gift of: ☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Enclosed is my cheque, payable to The Arthritis Society. OR

☐ Please charge my: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ American Express

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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