

# Tips for preventing and managing musculoskeletal conditions

Musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions affect people of all ages. They aren't just conditions of older age. They affect many tissues of the body, including<sup>1</sup>:

- joints
- tendons
- nerves
- muscles
- ligaments
- bones<sup>1</sup>

Conditions include:

- Arthritis
- Back and neck pain
- Osteoporosis
- Sarcopenia<sup>1</sup>

The conditions can range from short-lived to lifelong with ongoing pain. They can arise suddenly or develop and worsen over time. Pain and reduced mobility are the unifying features of the range of MSK conditions. If left unattended, some MSK conditions can lead to permanent degeneration.<sup>1</sup> Arthritis is the number one chronic disease in Canada, affecting 20% of Canadians aged 15 and older.<sup>2</sup>

## Contributing factors

In most cases, there isn't just one cause. Musculoskeletal conditions share similar lifestyle risk factors with other diseases. For example, obesity, smoking, and inactivity.<sup>1</sup> These factors are often modifiable and can improve quality of life – especially as people age.

For **workplace contributing factors**, Health & Safety or ergonomic programs can help. These programs can help to identify and address potential risks.



## Tips promote MSK health at any stage of life

**Stay active:** Keeping an active lifestyle is key. Physical activity and exercise can:

- help to keep a healthy body weight;
- prevent chronic conditions;
- manage stress;
- maintain strength, endurance, and
- increase mobility.<sup>3</sup>

Lumino Health's **Fitness Guide** and these articles can help you get started and maintain your fitness routine:

- **The benefits of exercise and how to get started**
- **What workouts are best for me?**
- **6 tips for working out at home**
- **How to prevent injury when exercising at home**
- **What to eat before a workout**
- **How to get the most out of your home workout**

**Posture:** Over time, poor posture can have negative effects on your overall health.

- **Slouch too much? How to improve your posture throughout the day**
- **Using posture correctors to stop slouching**

**Mobility:** Learn about these **exercises for keeping mobile as you age**.

**Preventing back pain:** Here are **5 simple ways to prevent back pain**. Another way is by **building your core strength**. Here are **8 core exercises you can do at home**. Pilates and other core strengthening exercises can also help to:

- alleviate back pain,
- improve your balance, and
- help prevent falls.

Two common reasons people experience back pain are:

- Lifting heavy objects incorrectly
- Sitting in one position for too long

Before lifting anything heavy or bulky, make sure you know how to do it safely. Check out this article on **how to lift heavy objects safely** for more information.

If you spend most of your day sitting for long periods, check out these great articles:

- **How to fit movement into your day**
- **Expert tips for an ergonomic desk setup**
- **6 chair exercises you can do at your desk**
- **Are standing desks good for you?**



**Sports:** Sports can help people get moving and connect with others, but they do come with risks. It's important to learn how to prevent sports injuries from happening, and when to seek medical help if an injury happens. Doing so lowers the chances of developing a chronic condition.

Here are some resources to share:

- **How to prevent the most common sports injuries**
- **Common running injuries and how to prevent them**

### **Managing musculoskeletal conditions**

For those suffering from a MSK condition, like arthritis, managing the condition can often be discouraging. This is because of chronic symptoms like pain and stiffness. That's why it's important to see a health-care provider. They can give an accurate diagnosis and decide the right treatment options. Being motivated to get better can also have a significant impact on long-term success.

Below are some resources to help manage musculoskeletal conditions.

#### **Manage the pain**

For severe symptoms, medication has traditionally been the first step in reducing pain and swelling. For milder symptoms, using heat can help to:

- relax muscles,
- relieve stiffness, and
- allow for more movement (like stretching).

Massage can also help increase circulation and reduce pain.

Here are some helpful articles:

- **Is massage therapy right for me?**
- **8 popular types of massage and their health benefits**

### **Physiotherapists vs. chiropractors: Who does what?**

- Physiotherapists can treat and help prevent injuries of the entire MSK system. This includes designing customized prevention plans.
- Chiropractors are experts of the spine and muscles. They focus on bones, joint problems and alignment.  
**First time visiting a chiropractor? Here's what to expect.**

### **Take care of yourself**

Managing symptoms and “flare-ups” is important. These articles can help you identify tips and strategies to manage your symptoms:

- **4 simple exercises to relieve lower back pain**
- **8 ways to treat lower back pain at home**
- **How to improve stress-related back pain**
- **The best sleep positions to manage back pain**

Following an injury, be careful with how you approach a return to activity. Building up gradually is key. This will help avoid re-injury and minimize recurring symptoms. Check out these tips for **returning to your fitness routine after injury**.

Technology can also help you track health management plans between visits to your healthcare provider.

- **Mental health apps to take charge of stress, anxiety and more**
- **An app for arthritis management**

Different people and conditions respond to different treatment and this can change over time. Keeping a journal of your pain level, symptoms and treatment regime can help you assess what works best for you. It's also a great way to help coordinate care programs if you have more than one health-care provider.

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization: **Musculoskeletal conditions**, 2019

<sup>2</sup> Arthritis Society. The Truth about Arthritis. Statistics drawn from Arthritis Community Research Evaluation Unit 2017 Report, based on results from the 2015 Canadian Community Health Survey. [www.arthritis.ca/about-arthritis/what-is-arthritis/the-truth-about-arthritis](http://www.arthritis.ca/about-arthritis/what-is-arthritis/the-truth-about-arthritis)

<sup>3</sup> Sanofi Healthcare Survey, 2018