

Tips for preventing and managing musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions



Preventing musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions

Musculoskeletal conditions affect people of all ages. They aren't just conditions of older age. They affect many tissues of the body, including¹:

- joints
- ligaments
- tendons
- muscles
- nerves
- bones¹

Conditions include:

- Arthritis
- Osteoporosis
- Back and neck pain¹

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.¹

Arthritis is the number one chronic disease in Canada. It affects 20% of Canadians aged 15 and older.²

Contributing factors

In most cases, there isn't just one contributing cause. MSK conditions share similar lifestyle risk factors to other diseases. For example, obesity, smoking, inactivity¹. 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. More information is available [here](#).

Tips to help promote musculoskeletal health at any stage of life

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 mobility³.

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Here are some resources you can share with your employees:

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

- [Slouch too much? How to improve your posture throughout the day](#)

Mobility: Share 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](#). Pilates and other core strengthening exercises can also help to:

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

Here are [eight ways to treat lower back pain at home](#) that you can share.

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. Also, 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](#).
- [Running advice from a physiotherapist to help you hit your stride](#)

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 healthcare 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](#)

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Treat the condition

[Physiotherapists vs. chiropractors: Who does what?](#)

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](#)

Physiotherapists can treat and help prevent injuries of the entire musculoskeletal system. This includes designing customized prevention plans.

Take care of yourself

Managing symptoms and “flare-ups” is important. Just as critical is how to 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](#).

- [4 simple exercises to relieve lower back pain](#)
- [6 tips for working out at home](#)

Health Coaches are experts in wellness. They can help you with:

- individualized nutrition and fitness programs,
- mindfulness, and
- lifestyle changes that meet your unique needs and goals.

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 managing arthritis](#)

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 healthcare provider.

Sources:

1. World Health Organization: [Musculoskeletal conditions](#), 2019
2. 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
3. Sanofi Healthcare Survey, 2018
4. Canadian Chiropractic Association: [An overview of musculoskeletal conditions](#), 2018

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