

# Managing arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions in the workplace

**TIPS BY YOUNG PEOPLE**

**VERSUS  
ARTHRITIS**

# INTRODUCTION

Disability and chronic pain conditions can impact any of us, at any age, or point, in our life. Whether starting out on our first job or considering a career change, being aware of our rights will help us make informed decisions.

Knowing our rights, where to go for help, and how to open up discussions in the workplace is essential for a healthier, inclusive, and accessible workplace for both employees and employers.

By sharing our tips in this leaflet, we hope to help you access the support you need to address any barriers you face in the workplace.



Recent UK-wide statistics on the state of musculoskeletal health share that:



**1 IN 3**

employees have a long-term health condition



**1 IN 10**

employees have an MSK condition



# RIGHTS

It is against the law for employers to discriminate against you because of a disability or health condition. The Equality Act 2010 (UK) and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Northern Ireland) protects you. This covers application, interviews, aptitude tests, job offer, terms of employment including pay, promotion, transfer and training opportunities as well as access to adjustments or support.

Discrimination in the workplace can mean being treated less favourably because of your disability, or your employer failing to make reasonable adjustments to ensure barriers to work are removed or alleviated.

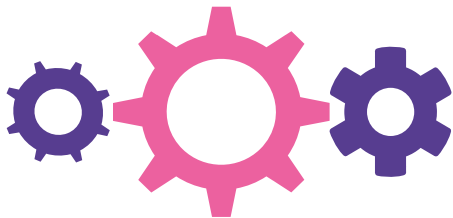
If you are being discriminated against in the workplace because of your disability, you can get help. If your workplace has a union, you can raise it with them. Organisations such as ACAS and Citizens Advice are available to help you.

# ADJUSTMENTS

Reasonable adjustments are adaptations or changes an employer is required to make to remove disadvantage related to someone's disability or health condition.

## Examples may include:

- Changes to work location, hybrid working, or home working when required
- Flexibility around medical appointments
- Alterations to the working environment and workstation
- Car parking space
- Regular breaks.



Every workplace and employer are different; while larger employers may have the funds and capacity to make changes, smaller ones may not. Being able to discuss your needs with your employer is the first step. While your employer may be able to support you with some equipment or adjustments, you may need to apply to the Access to Work scheme too.

Access to Work is a government scheme that aims to help remove barriers to work for any employee with a disability or long-term condition, including those who are self-employed.

Access to Work can help you identify what will help you by arranging for an independent assessment of your work-related needs. They can provide funding for specialist equipment, software, travel support, training, job coaching, mental health support, and support staff to help you with your job.

# WELLBEING



Working can have many benefits. The social aspect of working can make you feel less isolated, boost self-esteem, be enjoyable, and provide a focus away from being in pain. The right support and adjustments will ensure you are able to work well, which can improve your wellbeing and confidence.

## Ways to consider your wellbeing include:

**Communication:** with your manager, colleagues or workplace support services.

**Know your limits:** take a break, pace yourself, move around, or make alterations to your ways of working.

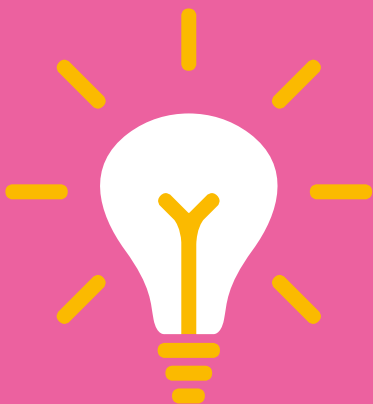
**Self-management and balance:** this could include getting enough sleep, making time for exercise, adjusting your workload during flare-ups of your condition, managing stress, and nutrition.

**Occupational health advice:** you may benefit from speaking with an occupational therapist, available through your health service, or via your employer if they offer this.

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“I have lived experience with arthritis and worked in a variety of sectors. For me the most important thing is finding an employer that is willing to recognise your needs as an employee. As someone with arthritis, I often feel as though I have to work as hard, if not harder, than my colleagues to prove myself. However, I found myself in a lot of pain from the strain of my job. You and your employer should understand that you might not be able to complete the same tasks as your colleagues, that’s okay. Never let an employer make you feel pressured to do something that may negatively affect you. You have to put your wellbeing first, and a good employer will support you.”

**Holly,** Young People’s Panel Member



# TOP TIPS

1

When looking for work, consider what adjustments or equipment could remove any barriers to work, including when your condition flares up.

2

Apply to Access to Work as soon as you have a job offer, or as soon as you identify a need for support.

3

Arrange regular review meetings with managers/supervisors – keep communication lines open.

# 4

Ensure any risk assessments are carried out with your input and any actions followed up on.



# 5

Occupational health practitioners can support with a workplace assessment, providing ideas and guidance for adjustments or equipment.



# 6

If you need time off work due to sickness, your doctor or health professional can provide you with a 'fit note'. This states that for a specific period you are unfit to work, or fit to work with adjustments in place.

# 7

Know your rights – know what you are entitled to and how to advocate for it.

## 8

Find out what works; ask others for tips on what adjustments or equipment made a difference to them.

## 9

When job hunting, consider hours, environment, and what might suit you, for example hybrid working, flex hours etc.

## 10

Check whether your company has an affiliated trade union, if not you can join the one most suitable to your sector. As a member you can get support or advice.

# USEFUL LINKS



<https://linktr.ee/ypfsuk>

Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition



ACAS: Disability at work



Versus Arthritis: Work – Support, commuting and self-help



Equality Act 2010



Disability discrimination law in Northern Ireland – a short guide



Mental Health at Work



NIDirect: Employment support for people with disabilities or health conditions



MSK Health Toolkit for employers and further education institutions



HSE: Advice for workers with musculoskeletal disorders





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