

Understanding your

# Arthritis pain



**Arthritis NZ**

Mateponapona  
Aotearoa

# Arthritis pain

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Pain is a common symptom of arthritis, affecting everyone differently. This booklet will help you understand some of the physical, social and emotional factors shaping your experience of pain when you have arthritis.

Arthritis is a changeable condition. Some days you may feel good and other days you won't. Understanding these factors and how pain works is important in reducing the impact on your life and how you can lessen your pain.



# What is going on when we have pain

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Pain is a normal and important human experience. Its purpose is to alert us to actual or potential sources of danger to our body, by encouraging us to withdraw from the situation, such as resting an injured limb for it to heal. This useful pain is often called acute pain. It responds well to medical intervention and is short lived.



Sometimes pain does not go away and can be more complex because it can really upset and change your everyday life. This type of pain is called chronic/long term or persistent pain. In this situation the nervous system becomes very sensitive and stops giving us accurate information about threats.



Learning about what influences your pain is important to help you understand how to manage your pain.

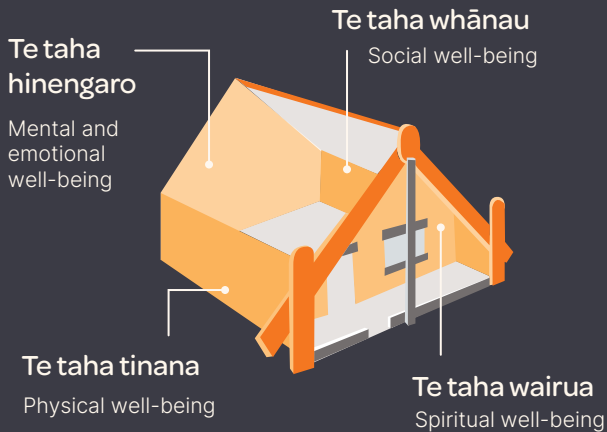
The good news is that long term pain can be changed. Read on for information on up to date treatments for supporting pain reduction by breaking the pain cycle and improving your quality of life.



# Māori Model of Health

Te Whare Tapa Whā is a Māori view of wellbeing, which recognises that health is more than the absence of disease. This model shows the important factors that affect our health and enhance our wellbeing.

**EACH OF THESE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF HAUORA INFLUENCES AND SUPPORTS THE OTHER.**



Mason Durie (1994) Te Whare Tapa Whā concept of hauora

# Treatment approaches to managing pain

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## Exercise regularly:

Your body works best if you keep active, even when you have arthritis. Regular exercise/ activity is the most recommended treatment to reduce your joint pain and improve flexibility, movement, muscle strength, bone strength, cartilage health and joint stability.

General health and well being including heart and lung function, energy level, sleep patterns, anxiety, depression and maintaining a healthy weight all benefit from regular exercise.



## Nutrition and weight:

A healthy diet can help you manage your arthritis. Aim to increase whole grains, vegetables, fruits and low-fat products. Try reducing the amount of fat, salt and sugar in foods and drinks. Foods containing omega-3's (e.g. oily fish) can help to reduce inflammation. The most important link between your diet and arthritis is your weight. If your weight is above the recommended range, then weight loss will decrease stress on load bearing joints such as hips, knees, ankles and feet.



### **Heat and cold:**

Heat will relax your muscles and increase your blood circulation. Try warm baths and showers, saunas, wheat packs or hot water bottles to relieve your pain. Cold numbs the painful area and reduces swelling. Try applying ice packs wrapped in a towel to the painful area for no more than 15 minutes, or a wheat pack that has been placed in a plastic bag in the freezer.



### **Emotional wellbeing:**

Relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, visualisation (creating mental pictures) and distraction (exercising, reading, listening to/ playing music) can help reduce stress, anxiety, low mood, and muscle tension. Use relaxation, breathing exercises and distraction every day.



### **Social support:**

Pain can sometimes reduce your confidence making you feel more vulnerable. Having a support network of positive caring friends, family/ whanau, and or community groups can help to reduce the experience of pain.





# Joint protection:

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Stress on sore joints can contribute to pain and stiffness. Adapting how you do your activities and tasks can protect your joints.

## SOME TIPS TO HELP PROTECT JOINTS



### **Pacing:**

Helps to reduce pain and improve function. When you begin a new exercise, begin slowly, then gradually build up the time and intensity. If pain lasts more than a few hours, this suggests you could reduce the intensity of your exercise next time. The same goes for activities you do, it is better to take frequent breaks to reduce joint strain rather than keep going and have pain that lasts.



### **Positioning:**

Helps to keep joints in the most stable position. Consider how you sit and stand and for how long. When sitting, it is recommended to stand and stretch every 20 minutes. Position items within easy reach.

There are gadgets and devices available to assist with joint protection.

Wearing supportive shoes with shock-absorbing soles and insoles will be helpful for your joints.





## **Prioritising and planning:**

Planning to do your activity the easiest way possible, such as dividing tasks into small jobs.

Do your most important tasks first, setting achievable goals. Plan your day around how you feel, allowing you to keep on doing the things you enjoy and are valuable to you.



## **Medications:**

Treatments for arthritis can include medications to reduce pain and improve function. Use medications as prescribed by your doctor and make sure you understand how they will help your arthritis. Learn how you should take them, how long they will take to work and possible side effects and interactions with other medications you are taking. Talking with a pharmacist will also help you learn about medicines you have been prescribed.





## **Complementary treatments:**

Many people experience benefit from other treatments and approaches to help relieve their pain and joint stiffness. There are many complementary options such as acupuncture, massage, tai chi, TENS, herbal supplements and rongoa, as well as art therapy, carving and weaving.

If you want to try herbal supplements, please discuss with your doctor or pharmacist as some products can react with your medications or make other health conditions worse.





## Sleep:

Pain can affect your quality of sleep. Treatment approaches outlined in this booklet have an important role in helping reduce your pain at night.

Some tips to help you get a good night's sleep:

- Keep to the **same sleep/ wake schedule** to create a routine
- **Establish good routines** that help to maintain regular activity during the day
- **Avoid caffeine and alcohol** before bed
- Try a **lighter evening meal**

Have a quiet time an hour or so before bed time, switch off your phone and television plus dim your lights to prepare to sleep.



## Flare-ups:

From time to time you may experience a flare-up. This is a short period of time when the symptoms of arthritis temporarily worsen and could include an increase in pain, swelling, stiffness and reduced mobility. The good news is that these flare-ups are usually temporary. If the symptoms continue, discuss with your doctor.



## Language:

Sometimes words and phrases used to talk about arthritis can make you worry about your joint health and consequently your pain. For example hearing and using words to talk about pain such as “degeneration,” “bone-on-bone,” may sound dangerous and painful.

**TRY TO FOCUS ON POSITIVE WORDS AND THOUGHTS, FOR EXAMPLE WHEN WE DO GENTLE REGULAR ACTIVITY:**



**“Motion is lotion”**

**“Use it to improve it”**

**“Gentle movement is medicine”**

## COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS:

Communicating well when you have a health appointment promotes shared decision-making about your health and any concerns, plus improving the experience of your visit.

**“Listen & share”**

**“Prepare for your visit”**

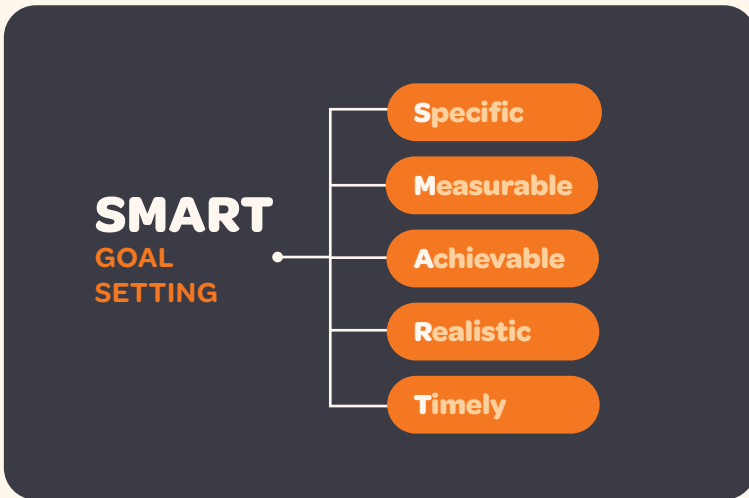
**“Ask questions”**

**“Note down what you need to do next”**



## Setting goals:

It is great to plan for the days and weeks ahead; realistic and achievable aims will help you stay motivated. Begin simply, working towards your goal. Try to be flexible as there will be good days and days you need to take a break. Have a plan for “bad days”, to help you to return to the “good days.”



If you are living with arthritis, you will find that having pain may be a part of your life. We are all different, meaning one type of pain management approach may work for you, though someone else may find relief in another way. Try the different approaches outlined in this resource, consider keeping an activity and/or food diary to record how you are feeling. Read, learn, talk to others, and perhaps join a support group.

This booklet covers some of the key ways of dealing with your arthritis pain. You can also discuss your pain further with our Arthritis Assist team.

Feel free to call **0800 663 463** and ask to speak with a team member from Arthritis Assist. The team have experience and expertise working with people with arthritis.

Arthritis Assist can help you put the ideas in this booklet into action.





Arthritis New Zealand aims to **improve the life of every person affected by arthritis**. We are a national not-for-profit organisation focused on raising awareness, advocating for those with arthritis and providing advice and support.

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**“I rang 0800 663 463 as I needed to talk to someone about the pain my arthritis is causing me. Your lovely Arthritis Assist person was so helpful and encouraging and really made me feel better and gave me a plan to work on. Thank you so much.”**

- Anonymous.



**Need help  
with your  
arthritis?**

Arthritis Assist can support you with managing pain, staying active, and understanding your arthritis.

**Call: 0800 663 463**

**Email: [info@arthritis.org.nz](mailto:info@arthritis.org.nz)**



# Useful websites

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[www.myjointpain.co.nz](http://www.myjointpain.co.nz)

[www.paintoolkit.org](http://www.paintoolkit.org)

[www.arthritisresearch.uk.org](http://www.arthritisresearch.uk.org)

[www.healthnavigator.org.nz](http://www.healthnavigator.org.nz)

[www.calm.auckland.ac.nz](http://www.calm.auckland.ac.nz)

[www.sleepio.com](http://www.sleepio.com)

[www.nzps.org.nz/pain-resource/](http://www.nzps.org.nz/pain-resource/)

[www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/food-and-physical-activity](http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/food-and-physical-activity)

[www.starship.org.nz/for-health-professionals/clinical-services-at-starship/paediatic-pain-service/complex-pain-service](http://www.starship.org.nz/for-health-professionals/clinical-services-at-starship/paediatic-pain-service/complex-pain-service)

## Useful support opportunities

### **1737 COUNSELLING SERVICE:**

Free Phone or Text 24 hours/7 days a week for anyone who wants 'to talk to a counsellor'

## References

Explain Pain. Authors: Butler, D. and Moseley, G.L 2013. The Protodometer. Authors: Moseley, G.L, and Butler, D. 2015.



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WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

**[www.arthritis.org.nz](http://www.arthritis.org.nz)**

Call **0800 663 463** and speak to our Arthritis Assist team.

Email us at **[info@arthritis.org.nz](mailto:info@arthritis.org.nz)**

**Social media**



**Support us**

**Help support people living with arthritis**

Scan to donate and make a difference today.



**Auckland**

Unit B 383 Khyber Pass Road Newmarket, Auckland 1023

**Wellington**

Level 2, 120 Featherston Street, Fullbright House, Wellington

Postal address: P O Box 10020, Wellington 6140

0800 663 463

**[www.arthritis.org.nz](http://www.arthritis.org.nz)**

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