



Arthritis NZ
Mateponapona
Aotearoa

Living well with **arthritis**

Emotional wellbeing: making sense of the invisible

Living with arthritis brings challenges that go far beyond the physical. Because many symptoms are unseen, people often feel misunderstood or isolated. The ongoing symptoms, lifestyle adjustments, and uncertainty can take a significant emotional toll. Managing your emotional wellbeing is therefore important in maintaining overall health and quality of life.

The window of tolerance

Your window of tolerance is the zone where you can manage emotions and respond effectively. When you move outside it, you may feel:

- **Hyperarousal** – anxious, tense, overwhelmed
- **Hypoarousal** – flat, disconnected, shut down

The goal isn't to eliminate these states, they are part of being human, but to recognise when they occur and use tools to help bring yourself back into balance.

Grounding: the 5-4-3-2-1 technique

A quick way to calm the body and mind:

- **5** things you can **see**
- **4** things you can **touch**
- **3** things you can **hear**
- **2** things you can **smell**
- **1** thing you can **taste**

Notice and name

Pause and identify what you feel, without judging it.

**"I notice tightness in my chest and name that as anxiety."
"I notice heaviness and name that as sadness."**

Labelling emotions helps reduce their intensity and increases self-awareness. You might combine this with grounding: once you notice and name the feeling, you can use sensory awareness to bring yourself gently back to the present.



Regaining control

While illness can feel disempowering, focus on what you can influence:

- Communicate assertively with health professionals
- Keep records and ask questions
- Build a support team
- Be persistent and informed

Self-compassion

Be kind to yourself, respond as you would to a good friend.

Acknowledge effort, celebrate progress, and remember that living with a chronic condition takes courage every day.

Key takeaway

You can support your emotional wellbeing by noticing and naming feelings, grounding in the present, regaining control and treating yourself with compassion.

This fact sheet was created from the information presented in the webinar: **Emotional wellbeing and long-term health conditions** presented by Clinical Psychologist Tamyra Matthews. Scan the QR code to watch on Youtube.



This fact sheet was developed with support from Palmerston North Psychology Clinic – Massey University

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website

- @ info@arthritis.org.nz
- www.arthritis.org.nz
- 0800 663 463