

What to do while you wait

While you're waiting for your orthopaedic appointment or next steps, there are things you can do to help manage your condition and stay as well as possible:

- Keep moving – regular exercise can help maintain your strength, joint function, and wellbeing.
- Join a community class.
- Join the Arthritis NZ online support group.
- Talk to your GP or pharmacist about pain relief.
- Connect with a health coach or health improvement practitioner at your GP clinic for extra wellbeing and mental health support.
- Explore online programs or apps – some offer guided exercise or pain management tools, and make some suggestions.

Visit the Arthritis NZ website for more ideas!



Scan here to learn more and find patient stories



Want to learn more? Scan QR code:



Aotearoa Osteoarthritis Guidebook
– A guide to living well



Information for people with
Knee Arthritis



Information for people with
Hip Arthritis

Arthritis NZ support services Arthritis Assist

Arthritis Assist is a free service from Arthritis NZ that can help you understand your condition, prepare for appointments, and feel more confident about your next steps.

Our trained team can support you with practical advice on managing pain, staying active, understanding treatment options, and making sense of medical language or referrals.

Contact Arthritis Assist

Phone: 0800 663 463

Email: info@arthritis.org.nz

Website: www.arthritis.org.nz/contact-us

YOUR ORTHOPAEDIC ASSESSMENT JOURNEY

Understanding what happens
and what the options are.



Arthritis NZ
Mateponapona
Aotearoa

What is an orthopaedic assessment?

If a GP thinks your joint needs further assessment, they will send a referral to the orthopaedic department at the hospital.

What happens next?

- Your GP sends a referral to the hospital.
- In most instances, you will get a letter once the hospital has received your referral.
- Your referral will be reviewed by an experienced clinician who will consider all factors and the benefit from the intervention.
- If you are offered an appointment, the hospital orthopaedic department will send you a date and time for your assessment.

The assessment is your first face-to-face talk with the hospital team to help decide the next steps.

FAQs

Things people often ask

What happens if I don't hear from orthopaedics?

- Contact your GP or the hospital to follow up.

What if my letter from the hospital says I have been referred and accepted but they do not have capacity?

- This is an ongoing issue within the Health sector and Arthritis NZ is advocating for better support and response from the public health system.

Can I be assessed privately?

- An alternative to the public system is to consider being assessed privately. This will come at a cost to you or may be covered by your health insurance. In most cases you will need a referral from your GP to the specialist.

To find out more about your consumers rights scan here:



Who will you see at the hospital?

At your assessment, you will see one of these specialists who will determine your next steps either:

- Orthopaedic surgeon
- Advanced clinical practice physiotherapist
- Orthopaedic registrar
- Clinical nurse specialist

They will ask about your pain, movement, and how your daily life is affected. They may also order scans (like x-rays or MRIs) or other tests.

Your appointment will help you understand your condition and what options might be available next. These options are for you to consider and work through with your specialist.

How long will this take?

The target is to be seen within 4 months for your referral but this can depend on your region's capacity and resources.

Good questions to ask at your appointment

- What are my different options?
- How long will each option take?
- If I need surgery what is the rehab process like?

After your assessment

Based on your assessment, you may be offered one or more of the following treatment options:

1. Non-surgical treatment

- Rehabilitation such as cycling or physiotherapy
- Pain medications (e.g. anti-inflammatories)
- Weight management
- Other supportive approaches

2. Injections

- Less commonly used, but may be discussed in some cases

3. Surgery

- If surgery is recommended, you may first be referred to a hospital physiotherapy "prehab" programme to help you get fit for surgery
- After surgery
 - You will have a rehab program within the hospital or through a private provider (physio)
 - Return to your GP for support, and/or
 - Be reviewed again by your specialist

If surgery is not needed or not possible due to resource limits, your GP should continue to support you.

Call Arthritis Assist 0800 663 463 to discuss alternative options and what options are available in your area.

Cultural awareness and support

We respect all cultures and will support you in ways that work for you and your whānau/family or your wider support network. We're here to help you feel confident, supported, and informed throughout your journey. Don't hesitate to take whānau/family to your appointments and ask questions. If anything is unclear, just ask.

