

# Flare Up Planning

## ARTHRITIS ACTION FACTSHEETS



Many people with arthritis find that their joints just seem to hurt more at different times.

This may be after doing a bit more than usual, such as after a period of stress, a change in routine, the weather, or there may be no good reason at all.

These 'flare ups' are normal. They can last for a few hours or days, and will usually improve by themselves. However, it's important to have a management plan to help you cope and take control. It's also important to remember that most flares will pass and you will feel better, even if it doesn't feel like that at the time.

### Make a note of your triggers

During a flare up, it can be helpful to make a note of what might have made you feel worse. Common things include doing too much, or even not doing enough, for example cutting down your normal level of activity. Stress is a major trigger for many people, often because it affects sleep which will make your pain worse.

Do you have any new or resurfaced worries that have got worse recently or have you been unwell? Have you forgotten to pace your activities? For example, have you pushed yourself too much to get a job done when you probably should have taken breaks or asked for help?

It's also worth asking yourself what has helped with a flare up in the past. It can be helpful to record what you have tried to help your symptoms and what has worked for you in the past so that you can be better prepared in the future.

## Relative rest

Movement is beneficial for the whole body. However, when you are in the middle of a flare up it may be necessary to rest for a while and really look after yourself. Reduce the activities that are most uncomfortable, but try to get back to normal activity as soon as you are able.

## Painkillers

Painkillers may help to take the edge off your pain and allow you to get back to your usual activities sooner. It is important to take medications as prescribed in order to get the maximum benefit. It can also be useful to ask your GP for a medication review occasionally to ensure you have the right medication for you.

## Distraction

Keeping your mind focussed on an absorbing hobby or activity can really help. Reading a book, watching TV, playing mind games like Sudoku, and getting out of the house rather than dwelling on the pain can all help you to manage your symptoms.

## Relaxation

Similarly, relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, guided imagery, or meditation can calm the nerves that report pain. These techniques can also stimulate the release of natural pain killing hormones called endorphins. Mindfulness is a specific type of meditation that has been shown to offer benefit to people living with persistent pain such as arthritis.

## Apply heat or cold packs

The nerves that conduct pain also conduct temperature sensation. Stimulating these nerves by applying hot or cold packs can help to reduce the amount of pain you feel.

## Talk about how you feel

Sometimes, sharing how you are feeling with a friend or relative can really help. They can offer emotional or practical support, as well as giving you a chance to express your emotions and talk through how you are feeling out loud.

## Try offering a kindness to someone else

When we are suffering with pain, doing a small act of kindness for someone else can help us too. It doesn't have to be anything big, just a phone call, an email, or a thank you can help boost how we feel about ourselves and can help us better manage pain.

## Ask for help

If your flares are frequent or you can't manage your pain, there is always someone who can help. Speak to your GP, consultant, or rheumatology team for advice.