Addressing Anxiety and Depression

Coping Strategies and When to Seek Additional Support

MENTAL HEALTH AND ARTHRITIS



Addressing Anxiety and Depression

Living with arthritis impacts both physical and mental wellbeing. Anxiety and depression are common when living with a painful, long-term condition such as arthritis.

Anxiety is a natural response to pressure, feeling afraid or threatened. The uncertainty of living with a condition such as arthritis can cause this. Each day is different; symptoms can change and there is not one linear approach to treatment.

Depression is a common mental health condition defined by persistent low mood, or the loss of enjoyment in everyday things. It might be accompanied by low energy, tiredness and changes to sleep patterns. It is more than simply feeling unhappy or fed up every so often.

Some people might not realise that the symptoms they are experiencing are related to anxiety or depression. You might find it difficult to carry out your daily tasks, see friends and family, feel worried about what your future with arthritis might look like or be scared about making the pain worse.

If you feel like you are experiencing anxiety or depression, it might be helpful to make a note of any symptoms or changes you are feeling within yourself. This might be feeling low, tearful, hopeless or worried. Some people report that getting out of bed in the morning is difficult.

It is preferable to get support for this once you notice your symptoms instead of waiting for them to go away on their own. Making an appointment with your GP is a helpful starting point. They will be able to tell you about the options available.

This might mean a referral to **NHS Talking Therapies** (some have specialised support for people with long-term conditions), coping strategies or medication. They might also want to make a follow-up appointment to find out how you are getting on. If you are prescribed medication, please follow guidance from your GP.

If you care for somebody who lives with arthritis, it is important to keep an eye on both their physical and emotional wellbeing. If you notice any changes, encourage them to see their healthcare professional.

Useful resources

We have some helpful resources addressing anxiety and depression.

- Visit our **Mental Health Directory**: **https://www.arthritisaction.org.uk/living-with-arthritis/resource-centre/mental-health-directory**
- View further **Mental Health and Wellbeing resources**: **https://www.arthritisaction.org.uk/living-with-arthritis/self-management/mental-health-wellbeing**
- You can also our **Arthritis and Anxiety Webinar on YouTube**: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwnrTdBS3Bo**

Coping Strategies

There are many different coping strategies you can put in place to help you manage your emotional wellbeing. It is important to remember that what works for somebody else, might not work for you. It might take some trial and error to find the right approach for you.

Communication

Maintaining communication with friends, family, colleagues and healthcare professionals is key to managing anxiety and depression. It is important they know how you feel so that they can support you. You might experience good and bad days, and this might impact the type of support you need. If you are finding the level of support to be overwhelming, please don't push them away. It might be helpful to set some boundaries.

Physical activity

Keeping active is a great way to release tension and lift your mood. This might be going for a walk in the fresh air or doing some exercise classes. You might want to join a local exercise class which will also provide a sense of community and social interaction. If you are unsure of where to start with exercise, we have some great options you can try in the comfort of your own home. **View exercise and arthritis resources.**

Distraction techniques

Distraction techniques can be used to help relax your mind. This might include deep breathing, muscle relaxation, trying a new hobby and mindfulness. Different approaches work for different people.

Social activities and social prescribing

Spending time with others and making time to get out of the house is beneficial for overall wellbeing. Social Prescribers often work in GP surgeries or other community settings depending on your location. They can support you to try new activities and take the steps to meet new people and take part in activities within a safe environment.

Keep a journal

Keeping a record of how you feel can be a helpful way to understand both the physical and mental symptoms associated with living with arthritis. It can help you identify patterns in your mood and symptoms over time. You can also use journals to help inform any medical appointments as they act as a good reminder of your experience.

Useful resources

We have some helpful resources to support your coping strategies.

- Find out more about **Arthritis Action Groups**: **https://www.arthritisaction.org.uk/arthritis-action-groups**
- Listen to the **'Adapting to Life with Arthritis' Podcast** (S5E4): **https://www.arthritisaction.org.uk/arthritis-action-podcasts/arthritis-action-podcast-adapting-to-life-with-arthritis**
- Learn more about our **Positive Wellbeing resources**: **https://www.arthritisaction.org.uk/living-with-arthritis/resource-centre/positive-wellbeing**
- View **Exercise and Arthritis resources**: **https://www.arthritisaction.org.uk/living-with-arthritis/self-management/exercise-and-arthritis/**

When to Seek Additional Support

It is important to remember you do not have to manage anxiety or depression on your own. It is better to seek additional support sooner rather than later, rather than let your symptoms get worse. This can make them harder to manage in the long run. If you know anyone else experiencing anxiety or depression, please don't compare your symptoms to theirs as this might prevent you from seeking help if you think they are worse off than you.

Your GP is a good first port of call. In some cases, you can directly refer yourself to **NHS Talking Therapies** for anxiety and depression. You do not have to have a diagnosed condition to use this service.

If you are concerned about the wellbeing of somebody you care for, please try and seek additional support rather than attempting to manage this by yourself.

If you or somebody you care for is experiencing an urgent mental health crisis, please contact 111 and select the mental health option.

They will be able to tell you the right place to get help. However, if you are unable to keep yourself safe, please go to your closest Accident and Emergency Unit or call 999. A mental health emergency needs to be taken as seriously as a physical one.

For lower-level anxiety and depression, our **Mental Health Directory** has different support options to choose from.

Useful resources

Support is available if you're struggling with anxiety and depression.

- Find out more about **NHS Talking Therapies**: **https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/find-nhs-talking-therapies-for-anxiety-and-depression**
- Visit the **Mental Health Directory**: **https://www.arthritisaction.org.uk/living-with-arthritis/resource-centre/mental-health-directory**

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