

# Managing My Musculoskeletal Health

Physiotherapy



## What are Musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions and injuries?

- **MSK conditions** and **injuries** usually affect your muscles, joints or tendons.
- **Most of these** conditions and injuries get **better** on their **own** within a relatively **short** amount of **time**, in most cases within **twelve weeks**. Occasionally it may take longer, but **rarely** causing long term problems.
- Whilst it is natural to be **worried** about your condition, your body is **strong** and has natural **healing** capacities and there are a number of things **you can do** that can help you manage your condition or injury.



## What can I do myself to help recover from my MSK condition or injury?

- **Stay active:** Whilst this may be initially difficult due to the pain, **staying active** can **help your body recover** from your musculoskeletal problem. As a guidance, you can use the pain scale underneath try and **continue with activities** that **do not increase** your pain levels above **5 out of 10**.



**6-10**

Reduce activity level or intensity

**4-5**

Acceptable - Monitor reaction

**0-3**

Continue with activity



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## What can I do myself to help recover from my MSK condition or injury? cont.

- **Exercise:** General and progressive exercises are a great way to help you recover. Gradually re-introducing activities that may be painful can help you get stronger and prevent fearful behaviours that may arise from avoiding those activities.
- **Control your pain:** pain medications allow you to stay active, especially when taken effectively; this means you can continue with normal daily activities more easily, carry out your exercises and sleep better. Pain relief, when taken for short term use does not increase your risk of tissue damage. Always read the label and check with your GP/pharmacist if you are unsure on what the best medication is for you.

If you can access online resources, our physiotherapists recommend you use:

- The **self-help section** of our website for information and support with specific MSK conditions and injuries
- Our free **NHS Mid and South Essex getUBetter app** for an easy, safe and effective way to help you self-manage your MSK condition or injury.

If you are already under the care of the Provide Physiotherapy service or have been added to a patient initiated follow up (PIFU) pathway, your physiotherapist may have already provided you with this information as part of the PIFU process. For more details, see the '**Musculoskeletal Health Patient Initiated Follow Up (PIFU)**' information leaflet.

### QR Links:

Self-help section



NHS Mid and South Essex getUBetter app



PIFU



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## What factors impact on my MSK health?

### Physical Activity and Exercise

Put simply, there is nothing that would benefit your health or MSK health more than **being physically active**. The benefits of exercise are extensive:

- It helps **lower the risk** of cardiovascular, metabolic and respiratory conditions.
- It provides **good adaptation** for bones, muscles and tendons, thus **reducing** your risk of injury.
- Exercise is also the most **natural pain-relief** medication available to you.
- It can **tackle low mood** states such as **anxiety** and **depression**.

It is recommended that you carry out at least **150 minutes** of **moderate intensity activity** or **75 minutes** of **vigorous activities** spread across **four to five days per week**, although **as little as 15 minutes** of regular daily exercise will provide **health benefits**.

If you need some help to get started, **speaking to your physiotherapist** or **other healthcare or fitness professional**.



### Stress and Mood

Most of us will experience **stress, anxiety** or **depression** at some point in their life. Some of these mood states **may be normal** and even useful when experienced for **short periods of time** (e.g. think of your work productivity when close to a deadline). After a while though, our brain may decide to respond by **ramping up** or even **switching on** our pain systems. We also know that there are **important links** between stress and cardiovascular diseases.

So, if you're experiencing mental health issues:

- Get **physically active** to release all the '**good mood**' substances in your body.
- Reach out to friends or family, or even services such as **Health in Mind** for support.

#### QR Links:

Health in Mind



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## Sleep

There is a **strong link** between **sleep** and **MSK health**. A lack of sleep or irregular sleeping patterns can really **amplify your pain** sensation, impact your body's ability to **heal** and **regenerate itself**, and increase the risks of **obesity, heart disease** and **diabetes**. Here are a few things you may want to try to improve your sleep:

- ➔ Have a **good daily routine** that gets you **active**.
- ➔ **Choose wisely** what you **drink** or **eat** - caffeine, energy drinks or heavy meals right before bed may impact your sleep quality.
- ➔ Have a good **bedtime routine** - try to **minimise** the use of bright screens immediately before falling asleep.
- ➔ Try a few minutes of **meditation** and **deep breathing** before bed time.
- ➔ Try **pain relief medication** to alleviate the pain and allow you to sleep.



## Overweight and Obesity

Maintaining a **healthy body weight** should be everyone's **priority**. Obesity is one of the leading causes for **death** and the underlying factor for different conditions such as **heart disease, type 2 diabetes** and various types of **cancers**. Obesity may cause and even worsen certain types of MSK conditions such as **osteoarthritis, low back pain, tendon problems, muscle injuries** or **bone health**.

Any weight loss, **no matter how small**, can help to **reduce the risks** for these conditions. Keeping your weight in check should start from carrying out **regular physical activities** and monitoring **what and how much you eat**.



## Diet and Nutrition

It is really important that you **consider what you eat** as this can have a direct effect on your musculoskeletal health. By eating the **correct foods**, it can also **improve your speed of recovery** from a current musculoskeletal problem as well as your **general health** and **wellbeing**.

**Poor nutrition** speeds up the **decline** in musculoskeletal health and has **more of an impact** the **older** you are. A **lack of protein** in your diet contributes to a **loss of muscle mass, reducing strength** and **increasing risk** of **musculoskeletal injury** and **falls**. There is also evidence to suggest **low vitamin D** can be associated with **poor muscle strength** and **weaker bones** which can be **worsened further** if you are **not exercising** or **going outdoors** as much due to a musculoskeletal problem or any other reason.

We also know that **poor diet** and **nutrition** can affect **tendon health** and therefore cause an **increasing risk** of **tendon related problems** and **slower recovery** following a tendon injury.

Speak to your **physiotherapist** or **other healthcare professional** for **further advice** if required.



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## Smoking

We are all familiar with the **negative effects** of smoking on our **health**. It can **increase** the risks for **lung cancer, heart attacks** and **strokes**. However, smoking can also:

- **Reduce bone strength** and increase **risk of fractures**.
- **Heighten the inflammatory** levels within your body, making it **more likely** to develop **tendon problems** or **inflammatory conditions** such as **rheumatoid arthritis**.
- **Increase** the duration of **recovery** after surgery or injury and **significantly slow down** your healing times after a fracture.
- **Amplify pain levels** - Back pain is **twice as likely** to occur if you smoke.

**Quitting smoking** can **reduce the risk** of all of these health problems. Research tells us, that you are **four times** more likely to stop with the **help** of **professionals** and **medications**. **Contact your GP** or **speak to your physiotherapist** to direct you to **stop smoking services**.



## Alcohol

The **maximum recommended** weekly alcohol intake is **14 units** per **week** spread across the week, with at least **two alcohol free days**. Obviously the **less** you drink the **better** it is for your overall **health**.

Excessive and long-term alcohol intake can:

- Increase the **inflammatory levels** and **pain sensitivity**.
- Lead to **chronic pain conditions** (eg persistent back pain) and more **aggressive arthritis**.
- Cause **damage** to our liver, stomach, nerves and brain which may even lead to **life-threatening diseases**.
- Worsen **mental health** conditions.
- Provide almost the **same number of calories** that fat does, so you're at increased risk of **gaining weight**.

We know that **reducing alcohol consumption** may be difficult so please **speak to your GP** or **physiotherapist** to help you find a better way to **manage your alcohol intake** if needed.



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## Work

Work can be **beneficial to your health**, especially when working in a supported environment, as carrying out meaningful work can help **improve your own wellbeing**. Having the **social interaction** with work colleagues can also promote **good health** and **make you feel better**.

**MSK conditions** or **injuries** can have an **impact** on your ability to work which can then have effects on you **psychologically** and **financially** although it is recommended that you **continue to work** where possible. Sometimes there might be a need for you to **temporarily reduce your hours** or **adapt aspects of your job** after a discussion with your employer.

Modifying physical environments and work practices can **reduce the incidence of musculoskeletal problems or injury** and early intervention to identify and address any issues can **minimise persistent pain, disability** and **time off work**.

## Further Support

For more information on any of these factors that impact on your **MSK health**, including access to **self-assessment** and **general health screening tools**, visit our [Health Promotion Page](#).

For more **help** and **support** to improve any of these factors that impact on your **MSK health** or **general health**, contact [Essex Wellbeing Service](#).



### QR Links:

Health Promotion



Essex Wellbeing Service



## What can I do to maintain good long-term MSK health?

- Keep **active** and engage with **regular exercise** or **sport**.
- Make sure that you are getting **enough** and **regular sleep**.
- Eat **healthily, regularly** and in **moderation**.
- Try to **avoid** or **limit** drinking **alcohol** and **smoking**.
- **Manage stress levels** where possible.



## Useful Contacts



Essex Wellbeing Service -  
[essexwellbeingservice.co.uk](http://essexwellbeingservice.co.uk)

Health in Mind – Mid Essex IAPT -  
[hpft-iapt.nhs.uk/service/mid-essex](http://hpft-iapt.nhs.uk/service/mid-essex)



Active Essex –  
[activeessex.org](http://activeessex.org)

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