

Self-help series fact sheet 3

Managing joint and muscle pain

Moving regularly helps keep your muscles and joints in good condition. If you're recovering from COVID-19, you probably haven't been as active as you would typically be when in good health. This lack of activity can lead to muscle and joint pain.

When patients exercise after COVID-19, they often try activities that elevate the heart rate, such as walking and cycling. However, research is finding that cardiovascular exercise is the most difficult type of activity for patients with post-COVID syndrome. Instead, start with resistance activities, such as working with resistant bands, light weights, yoga, or pilates, and once this goes well, you can throw in some light cardio.

Your GP, or physiotherapist can help you reduce muscle and joint pain by suggesting exercises that improve muscle strength and ultimately your ability to move painlessly. We will talk about returning to exercise in another information sheet to ensure that you do it within your new energy limits.

When you have **debilitating fatigue** more so than just a tiredness you may feel pain in the joints or, more commonly, as an overall body pain that is often described with metaphors such as feeling run over by a truck. Pain can be caused by many different factors so sometimes working out the cause can be hard.

Possible causes include:

1. fatigue
2. sleep
3. overactivity



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4. de-conditioning
5. stress
6. emotions
7. posture
8. environment

When we are talking about pain we firstly must address the interactions between fatigue, pain and poor sleep. Improving one can have a positive effect on the other two.

Secondly, we must deal with the causes that are common to fatigue, pain and sleep. These include overactivity, inactivity, stress and strong emotions such as depression or anger. You can address those using things like pacing and breaking tasks into small steps and taking periodic rest), exercise, stress reduction and by managing emotions. These strategies help reduce all three symptoms.

Thirdly, deal with causes specific to pain. You might use pain specific remedies such as pain medications, heat and cold treatments, soaking in warm baths, massages etc.

If you need further information or support please have a look at our website at www.EmergeACT.org.au or the long COVID playlist on our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/@arthritisact3717