

# Ankylosing Spondylitis (Axial Spondyloarthritis) (AS)

Managing your AS Flares





# Medication

You may need the help of medicine to live with a chronic, inflammatory, and painful condition and to help deal with a flare. These include anti-inflammatories and painkillers.

We advise you take your medication, especially painkillers, as soon as you wake up and realise that you're having a flare.

The whole procedure of getting out of bed can be painful – so get help from painkillers as soon as possible.

Keep an emergency pack of your medication, water, and a biscuit next to your bed. Remember it can take a little time for your medication to start to work.

It's important to know the maximum dosage you can take in 24 hours for all your medications. It is easy to lose track of the number of doses taken, especially if you are feeling "muzzy-headed" and sleep-deprived.

Remember to replace your emergency pack of medicine ready for the next time it is needed.

*Ask your Rheumatologist, Rheumatology Nurse or GP to help you write down how you can safely increase your medications during a flare.*

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## Breathing Techniques

During the 20 minutes that you are waiting for your medication to work, the best and most effective thing to do to alleviate the flare symptoms is to **BREATHE**.

Research shows that just three good diaphragmatic breaths correctly learned when you are not experiencing a flare can greatly reduce pain levels by:

- Relaxing muscles.
- Controlling feelings of panic.
- Lowering your stress hormone levels.
- Giving you a feeling of being in control.

Slowing your breathing techniques avoids the fast panicky upper chest breathing associated with flares and will help to flood your system with oxygen and nutrients which in turn will help to break the build-up of pain.

## Mind / Body Link

Never underestimate the strong relationship between your mind and body.

Your head will always influence your pain and conversely your pain will always affect your head and mind. Your pain signals are received in your brain and that is what controls your response. So:

- PLAN a strategy where you make sure that you are in control of your AS and not the other way around. Your aim at this stage is to not allow the pain to build up to a level where it takes over your life; this is what is known as the cycle of pain.

- During a flare people can sometimes feel panicky, tearful and out of control. AS feeds off this stress.
- Acceptance. It is useful and helpful to think about your condition at this time, accept that you have it and then find a way to make it part of who you are but not what defines you.









# Educating Family, Friends and Colleagues

It is best to explain your condition when you are feeling well. There is nothing worse than having to explain AS when you are feeling unwell, miserable, grumpy and tearful.

People close to you can become anxious and worried when they see you in pain; it can help to reassure them if they understand your condition.

Some people have a code word for a bad AS day so the whole family can understand how they are feeling, and this helps to decrease tension for everyone.

You can get extra guidebooks from NASS and a guide to managing AS at work which gives advice on talking to your managers and work colleagues.

## Finally

If your flares increase in number or intensity, seek advice from your rheumatology team or GP as your medication or its dosage might need changing.

**DO NOT SUFFER IN SILENCE.** There is help out there.

# NASS resources

## NASS GUIDEBOOK

A practical introduction to the treatment and management of ankylosing spondylitis with useful advice on living and working with AS.

## GUIDE TO MANAGING YOUR AS AT WORK

Includes how AS can affect your work, communicating about your condition, staying well at work and your rights.

## GUIDE TO ANTI TNF THERAPY

Everything you need to know about anti TNF therapy for AS.

## LEAFLETS

### Axial spondyloarthritis

An understanding of axial spondyloarthritis and how it fits with ankylosing spondylitis.

### Driving and AS

Safe driving, the DVLA, Forum of Mobility Centres, the Motability scheme and the Blue Badge scheme.

### Fatigue and AS

What causes fatigue in AS and how it can be managed.

### Uveitis and AS

Symptoms of uveitis and treatments.

## EXERCISE FOR AS

Exercise is not just a useful addition to the management of AS. It is one of the cornerstones of treatment. Exercise helps in the maintenance of flexibility and good posture and also assists with pain management and wellbeing.

## Back to Action

A guide to exercising safely in the gym (pdf version). You can also buy a printed, spiral bound version in the NASS shop.

## Back to Action App

We have now been able to produce an App for iPhones and android phones which you can download completely free of charge from iTunes and Google Play.

## Fight Back

Our exercise DVD aimed at people with more advanced AS who want to exercise at home. It includes 6 exercise programmes with 35 individual exercises and contains hip safe exercises.

## NASS BRANCH NETWORK FOR HYDROTHERAPY AND PHYSIOTHERAPY

There are 90 NASS branches providing regular physiotherapy and hydrotherapy sessions throughout the UK. Call NASS or check on our website under NASS Near You.

# NASS

NASS is a charity which provides support, advice and information for people with AS and their families.

Membership of NASS can go a long way towards improving your health and your life.

You'll benefit from up-to-date information on treatment, as well as support with information on benefits and work. You'll also connect with others in a similar situation.

Not only will you feel less alone, you'll be able to share solutions.

Here are some reasons why you should become a NASS member today!

- Access to our 90 regional branches offering regular physiotherapy and hydrotherapy sessions.
- Use our Exclusive NASS members' forum.
- Twice-yearly magazine, AS News.
- Free entry to our annual Members' Day.

## GET INVOLVED AND SUPPORT RESEARCH INTO AS

- Support other people affected by AS.
- Support our five year plan to focus on early diagnosis, patient empowerment and self management, access to physiotherapy and exercise and awareness.

## TO JOIN NASS

If you'd like to join online please go to our website at [www.nass.co.uk](http://www.nass.co.uk) and choose your membership in the NASS Shop.

If you'd like to pay by credit card and over the telephone please call **020 8741 1515**.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Brisa France and Ingrid Hill are two senior physiotherapists who have specialised in AS for over 10 years. They are based at the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases (RNHRD) in Bath, working on the AS Rehabilitation course under

Dr Raj Sengupta. The two week course aims to give patients an increased understanding of their AS and promotes self management of the condition. Patients can be referred to the course by their rheumatologist or their GP.

NATIONAL ANKYLOSING SPONDYLITIS SOCIETY

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