

# Life with rheumatoid arthritis

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Tools and techniques to  
help you lead a fulfilling life  
with rheumatoid arthritis



### Important Information

This information booklet has been compiled by TAL Life Limited ABN 70 050 109 450 (TAL) in consultation with:

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## Introduction

Living with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) can be a challenge. It can have a large impact on how you go about your day to day activities and may change your physical abilities.

In this booklet you will find some information to increase your understanding of rheumatoid arthritis as well as some tools and techniques to improve your health, wellbeing and management of rheumatoid arthritis.

While this information may help you, it is not a substitute for medical advice and it is important for you to maintain an ongoing relationship with your doctor, any medical specialists you may have and any other health professionals that are within your medical team.

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# Understanding rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease that causes pain and swelling of the joints.

It is a type of arthritis where your immune system mistakenly targets your own body, usually affecting the smaller joints, such as the joints in the hands and feet. However larger joints such as the hips and knees can also be affected.

In RA, the immune system targets the lining of the joints, causing inflammation and joint damage. Early symptoms include swelling, heat, tenderness, pain or stiffness in your joints. RA can occur at any age and is the second most common form of arthritis, affecting nearly half a million Australians<sup>1</sup>.

Rheumatoid arthritis affects different people in different ways. In some cases, the disease may disappear, or may come and go ('flare') for many years. For other people, the symptoms and disability may slowly worsen over time.

If left untreated, RA may lead to joint damage that cannot be repaired<sup>2</sup>. Other parts of the body may also be affected, such as your lungs or your eyes. Fortunately, these problems outside of your joints are uncommon and the risk is reduced dramatically with treatment.

The disease cannot be 'cured' at present, but for most people it can be controlled with on-going care. Many people achieve remission, which is the goal of treatment – control of symptoms and return to normal function. Joint replacement may be an option for people who have significant damage to their joints.

**Rheumatoid arthritis is often confused with osteoarthritis which is a wear and tear disease generally affecting the older population.**

ARTHRITIS IS A VERY COMMON CONDITION IN AUSTRALIA AFFECTING PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE. ITS SYMPTOMS OFTEN HAVE A BIG IMPACT ON THE DAILY LIVES OF PEOPLE<sup>1</sup>

## What are the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis?

The main symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis are joint pain, swelling and stiffness. You may also experience more general symptoms, and inflammation in other parts of the body.

In the early stages, these symptoms may come and go with no particular pattern. In some people the symptoms may disappear for weeks or years – or never appear again. In other people, the symptoms can last a lifetime.

The symptoms of RA vary from person to person. Rheumatoid arthritis typically affects the joints symmetrically (both sides of the body at the same time and to the same extent), but this isn't always the case.

**Joint pain and tenderness**  
The joint pain associated with RA is usually a throbbing, aching pain. It is often worse in the mornings and after a period of inactivity.

**Joint stiffness**  
Joints affected by RA can feel stiff. Like joint pain, the stiffness is often more severe in the morning or after a period of inactivity. Morning joint stiffness experienced with RA typically lasts longer than other non-inflammatory joint arthritis. You may feel stiffness in the joints for at least an hour after waking. The stiffness will eventually ease but can take some time.

**Swelling in the joints**  
The lining of joints affected by RA become inflamed, which can cause the joints to swell, and become hot and tender to touch.

**Other Symptoms**  
As well as problems affecting the joints, some people with RA experience a range of more general symptoms, such as:

- Tiredness and a lack of energy
- A high temperature (fever)
- Sweating
- A poor appetite
- Weight loss.

The inflammation associated with RA can also sometimes cause problems affecting other areas of the body, such as:

- Dry eyes – if the eyes are affected
- Chest pain – if the heart or lungs are affected.



### WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS?

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease. This means your immune system – which usually fights infection – attacks the cells that line your joints, making the joints swollen, stiff and painful. However, it's not yet known what triggers this.

There are a number of things that may increase your risk of developing RA, including:

**Family history**  
There's some evidence<sup>3</sup> that RA can run in families, although the risk of inheriting the condition is thought to be low as genes are only thought to play a small role in the condition.

**Hormones**  
Rheumatoid arthritis is more common in women than men<sup>4</sup>, which may be because of the effects of the hormone oestrogen, although this link hasn't been proven.

**Smoking**  
Some evidence suggests that people who smoke are at an increased risk of developing RA<sup>5</sup>.

**Environmental triggers**  
Can be a virus, infection, trauma, or having a very stressful episode in your life. There are many theories about environmental triggers but nothing's been conclusively identified.

# Treating rheumatoid arthritis

Treatment for rheumatoid arthritis can help reduce inflammation in the joints, relieve pain, prevent or slow joint damage, reduce disability and enable you to live as active a life as possible.

Although there's no cure for RA, early treatment and support – including lifestyle changes, medication, supportive treatments and surgery – can reduce your risk of joint damage and limit the impact of the condition.

## Your healthcare team

The best way to live well with arthritis is by working closely with your healthcare team. Your treatment will usually involve care from your doctor in addition to a number of different specialists, which may include rheumatologists, pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, podiatrists, nurses and psychologists.

### General Practitioner (GP)

Your GP is an important partner in managing your rheumatoid arthritis. They can also help you access other specialists, health professionals and services.

### Rheumatologist

All people with suspected or diagnosed RA should visit a rheumatologist. Rheumatologists are doctors who specialise in diseases of the joints such as rheumatoid arthritis.

The rheumatologist may start you on medicine to slow down the disease and reduce pain, and may also suggest physiotherapy. Because every person's rheumatoid arthritis is different, your rheumatologist will probably select different treatments over time to find the best one for you.

### Physiotherapy

Physiotherapists can advise you on the type of exercise you should do during different phases of your RA, as well as posture and non-medicine based pain relief. They may also use techniques to keep your joints and muscles flexible.

Treatments that physiotherapists may use include:

- Manual therapy
- Hydrotherapy – exercise in water
- Braces and taping
- Joint mobility exercises.



## WHEN SHOULD I SEE MY GP?

- You should visit your GP at least every three to four months once your treatment is underway
- Visit your doctor immediately if you notice a sudden worsening in symptoms or disability
- Think about, and write down, the questions you want to ask before your visit
- Consider taking a family member or friend with you as a second set of ears
- Ask your GP or health professional to explain any information that you did not understand
- Feel free to ask questions, especially about the benefits, side effects and costs of treatments.

## Occupational therapy

Occupational therapists can advise you on how to take stress and strain off joints affected by arthritis.

They look at all aspects of your daily life, including your job, the work you do around your home, as well as your leisure activities. They can then show you ways to conserve your energy by simplifying daily tasks, and how to protect your joints when you are performing those tasks.

## Podiatry

If you have problems with your feet, a podiatrist may be able to help. You may also be offered some type of support for your joints or shoe insoles that can ease pain.

## Orthopaedic Surgeon

If your joints are significantly damaged, the rheumatologist may refer you to an orthopaedic surgeon to assess your need for additional treatment.

Some people with rheumatoid arthritis need surgery to replace part or all of a joint, such as the hip, knee or shoulder joint. This is known as a joint replacement or arthroplasty.

## Managing your emotional health

As part of the holistic approach to managing RA, your doctor may refer you to a mental health specialist like a psychiatrist or psychologist to help you with your recovery:

- **Psychiatrists** are doctors who specialise in mental health. They can perform medical and psychological tests and prescribe medication. Your doctor can refer you to a psychiatrist
- **Psychologists** specialise in providing psychological treatment for depression and other related disorders. You do not need a referral from your doctor to see a psychologist. However, you may be able to claim a rebate for this treatment through Medicare if you have a referral from your doctor.

**Each person responds differently to arthritis medicines, which means that you will need to work with your specialist and doctor to find the best medications and doses for you.**

### The role of medications

There are a number of medications available that can be used to help stop RA getting worse and reduce your risk of further problems.

These are often divided into two types of medication: 'disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)' and 'biological treatments'.

### Disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)

If you've been diagnosed with RA, you'll normally be offered a combination of DMARD tablets as part of your initial treatment. These medications are particularly effective in easing symptoms of the condition and slowing down its progression.

DMARDs work by blocking the effects of the chemicals released when the immune system attacks the joints, which could otherwise cause further damage to nearby bones, tendons, ligaments and cartilage.

### Biological treatments

Biological treatments are a newer form of treatment for RA. They're usually taken in combination with DMARDs and are normally only used if these medications alone haven't been effective.

Biological medications are given by injection and they work by stopping particular chemicals in the blood from activating your immune system to attack your joints.

Your disease may change over time, including which joints are affected, how much pain or disability you experience and whether you have symptom-free periods. This means that you may need to change or add medicines over the course of your treatment – you may not be on the same medicine forever.

#### USEFUL TIP

*Medication can be decanted into different containers at some chemists if you have problems opening the standard packaging*

### Relieving Pain

In addition to the medications used to control the progression of rheumatoid arthritis, you may also need to take medication specifically to relieve pain.

#### Painkillers

In some cases, you may be advised to use painkillers to relieve the pain associated with RA. These medications don't help treat the underlying inflammation of your joints, but they can sometimes be helpful in relieving pain.

#### Non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs

In addition to – or instead of – painkillers, your doctor may prescribe a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID). These medications can help relieve pain while also reducing inflammation in the joints, although they won't stop rheumatoid arthritis getting worse over time.

Your doctor will discuss with you if and what type of painkillers and/or NSAID you should take and the benefits and risks associated with each of them.

#### Corticosteroids

If you have severe pain and inflammation in your joints, your doctor may prescribe a stronger anti-inflammatory medicine called a corticosteroid.

They can be used as:

- A tablet
- An injection directly into a painful joint
- An injection into the muscle

They're usually used to provide short-term pain relief – for example, while you're waiting for DMARD medication to take effect or during a flare-up.

#### USEFUL TIP

*Ask your doctor about timing your pain medication to ease morning joint pain and stiffness*

#### MONITORING YOUR TREATMENT

You will have blood tests at intervals during your treatment, and how often depends on which drugs you're taking. With the blood tests, your doctor can:

- Monitor how active your RA is and how it's responding to treatment – these blood tests are known as ESR and CRP
- Look out for early warnings of any possible side effects of your drug treatment
- Assess how the treatment is interacting with your immune system
- You may also have blood tests for kidney and liver function.

#### TAKING YOUR MEDICATION

It's important to take your medication as prescribed, even if you start to feel better, as medication can help prevent flare-ups and reduce the risk of further problems such as joint damage.

If you have any questions or concerns about the medication you are taking or side effects, talk to your doctor.



#### SIDE EFFECTS OF MEDICINES

All medicines have risks and benefits, so before you start treatment talk to your doctor and pharmacist about how each medicine should be helping you and what risks it might have.

Make sure your doctor knows about any other health problems that you or your family members have, as this can help them choose the best medicine for you.

You should also make sure that you understand what side effects the medicine might have, including what to do or whom to speak to if you experience any unwanted effects from your medication.

**Talk to your doctor if you have concerns about side effects, safety or cost.**



# Living with rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis can be life-changing. You may need long-term treatment to control your symptoms and reduce joint damage. Here are some things you can do to help keep your condition under control.

## 1 Self-Care

Self-care is an integral part of daily life. It involves taking responsibility for your own health and wellbeing with support from those involved in your care.

Self-care includes what you do every day to stay fit and maintain good physical and mental health, prevent illness or accidents and care more effectively for minor ailments and long-term conditions.

### Useful tips



#### Getting dressed

Replace awkward buttons with Velcro



#### Kitchen

Organise your storage system and keep items where they can be easily reached, preferably at waist level



#### Housekeeping

Use a trolley or basket to transport cleaning supplies



#### Gardening

Wrap foam or twist rubber bands around handles for a softer, more flexible and larger surface grip



#### Driving

A seatbelt extension makes seatbelts much easier to use and easier to handle



#### Regularly change your position

Staying in the same position for long periods can lead to tired muscles and stiff joints. It is generally recommended to change positions or stretch every 20 minutes



#### Go for a walk

It's simple, cheap and great exercise

### MANAGING A FLARE-UP

You may get better at noticing the early signs of a flare-up. Sometimes a few days rest is all you need however, it is important you continue to manage stiffness with gentle exercise. Your doctor may suggest painkillers during this time to help ease the pain.

Keep a record of the frequency you experience flare-ups. You should mention to your doctor if they become more regular or there is a change in your symptoms. A review of your treatment plan may be needed.

## 2

# Be aware of the warning signs

Rheumatoid arthritis is an inflammatory condition which can cause inflammation to develop in other parts of your body, such as your eyes, lungs, heart, bones, nerves, and blood vessels.

Thanks to early treatment, inflammation due to RA affecting other parts of the body is becoming less common. However, if left untreated RA can cause complications in other parts of your body. It is important to be aware of these complications and discuss with your doctor or rheumatologist if your symptoms change.



### Eyes

Inflammation of the eyes can lead to scleritis or Sjogren's syndrome. Scleritis can cause eye redness and pain, whereas Sjogren's syndrome can cause dry eyes. Signs of potential eye complications include:

- Blurred vision
- Dry eyes
- Eye pain
- Difficulty looking at bright lights
- Red eyes
- Change or loss in vision.



### Blood vessels

Inflammation of blood vessels (known as vasculitis) can lead to the thickening, weakening, narrowing and scarring of vessel walls. This can result in pain, swelling, loss of function, deformities and structural joint damage. Warning signs may include:

- Painful spots or redness on the nail beds, fingers or hands
- Painful rash on the skin, often on the legs
- Ulcers or sores on the skin.



### Lungs

Inflammation of the lungs or lung lining can lead to pleurisy or pulmonary fibrosis, which can cause chest pain, a persistent cough and shortness of breath<sup>6</sup>. Warning signs of lung disease include:

- Shortness of breath that gets progressively worse
- Chest pain
- Persistent cough
- Fever.



### Heart

Rheumatoid arthritis sometimes causes inflammation in or around the heart<sup>6</sup>. It can cause both myocarditis and pericarditis. Myocarditis is inflammation of the heart muscle. Pericarditis is inflammation of the membrane covering the heart.

### Cardiovascular disease

If you have RA, you're at a higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease (CVD) than the population at large<sup>7</sup>. CVD is a general term that describes conditions affecting the heart or blood vessels, and it includes life-threatening problems such as heart attacks and strokes.

It's not clear exactly why people with RA are at an increased risk of these problems. You can reduce your risk by ensuring your arthritis is well controlled and by reducing the impact of other factors that contribute to CVD, such as:

- Stopping smoking
- Eating healthily
- Exercising regularly.

### Nerve damage

Rheumatoid arthritis can affect the upper portion of the spinal cord known as the cervical spine. The deterioration of the joints in the neck can irritate and put pressure on the nerves in the spine. RA can also affect the peripheral nerves outside the brain and spinal cord. Carpal tunnel syndrome is a common condition in people with rheumatoid arthritis<sup>8</sup>. It's the result of compression of the nerve that controls sensation and movement in the hands (median nerve). Look out for the signs of potential nerve damage:

- Neck pain
- Problems with balance, coordination, or walking
- Abnormal sensations or numbness in the hands or feet
- Weakness or loss of fine motor skills.

### Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a loss of bone density. It makes fractures more likely. The inflammation associated with RA can also predispose people to osteoporosis. In addition, some medications used to treat RA as well as being physically inactive or sedentary can increase your risk for osteoporosis. Warning signs of bone loss may include changes in posture or curvature, broken bones from a fall and back pain.

Talk to your doctor about steps you can take to prevent bone loss. Your doctor may recommend calcium and vitamin D supplements, regular bone density checks or a change in your medications.

### Emotional effects

When you are managing RA, it is common to experience a range of emotions including loss of self-esteem, feelings of helplessness, stress, worry, anger, grief, frustration and sadness. The emotional distress may change over time as a result of changes in your capacity, your levels of and ability to cope with pain, changes in your symptoms and perceived effectiveness of your treatment.

It is, however, important to take note of how you are feeling and to address feelings of depression and anxiety that last longer than two weeks. If feel anxious or depressed, discuss it with your doctor. There are many things your doctor can offer that will help you feel better.



*Always discuss new symptoms with your doctor or rheumatologist*

# 3 Exercise

Regular physical activity benefits everyone, particularly if you have rheumatoid arthritis<sup>9</sup>.

Exercising regularly can help relieve stress, keep your joints mobile and strengthen the muscles supporting your joints. Exercise can also help you lose weight if you're overweight, which can put extra strain on your joints.

However, it's important to strike a balance between rest and exercise. Rest will make inflamed joints feel more comfortable, but without movement your joints will stiffen and your muscles will become weaker. You need to find out the best activities and the right balance for you.

### What sort of exercise?

Your physiotherapist will be able to guide you on when to exercise and when to rest, as well as what exercises are most beneficial for you as an individual. Usually they will recommend a combination of movement exercises to maintain joint mobility, as well as gentle stretches and strengthening exercises for the muscles. Exercise doesn't need to involve equipment, and often the simplest exercises are the best.

- Stretching exercises can help ease pain and improve joint movement
- Strengthening exercises improve the strength of the muscles that support our joints and keep them in the right position when we move

Fitness exercises are very important for general health. These exercises could be as simple as walking a bit further or joining a sports team or leisure centre so you can exercise with other people.

**Your doctor or physiotherapist can suggest suitable exercises to stretch and strengthen your muscles.**



**Walking:** a simple, cheap and very effective way to exercise. Putting weight through your legs when you walk helps keep your bones as strong as possible and reduces the risk of getting osteoporosis



**Swimming:** an excellent all-round form of exercise for people with arthritis because the joints are supported in the water, which makes it easier to move them



**Yoga:** some aspects of exercises taught in yoga can be good for people with arthritis. If you're not sure, discuss them with your physiotherapist



**Pilates:** strengthens core muscles and promotes good posture. Discuss which classes would be best for you with your physiotherapist



**Exercise programs:** provide a cardiovascular workout and all over body conditioning



**Hydrotherapy:** a set of exercises done in warm water under the supervision of a physiotherapist. It's a safe and effective treatment for arthritis and back pain

### MYTH: EXERCISE CAUSES FURTHER DAMAGE TO YOUR JOINTS

- Regular exercise is very important if you have arthritis as it can reduce pain and keep you healthy and independent<sup>5</sup>
  - Find a form of exercise you enjoy – and keep at it!
- If you're overweight, your joints will be under extra strain. Exercise can help you lose weight and ease some of this pain.

### Simple Exercises

It is a good idea to start with a supervised exercise program to help minimise any pain during exercise but also have some guidance from a health professional on how hard you should push yourself. Your Physiotherapist can tailor an exercise program to suit your fitness level and give you advice on where to start.

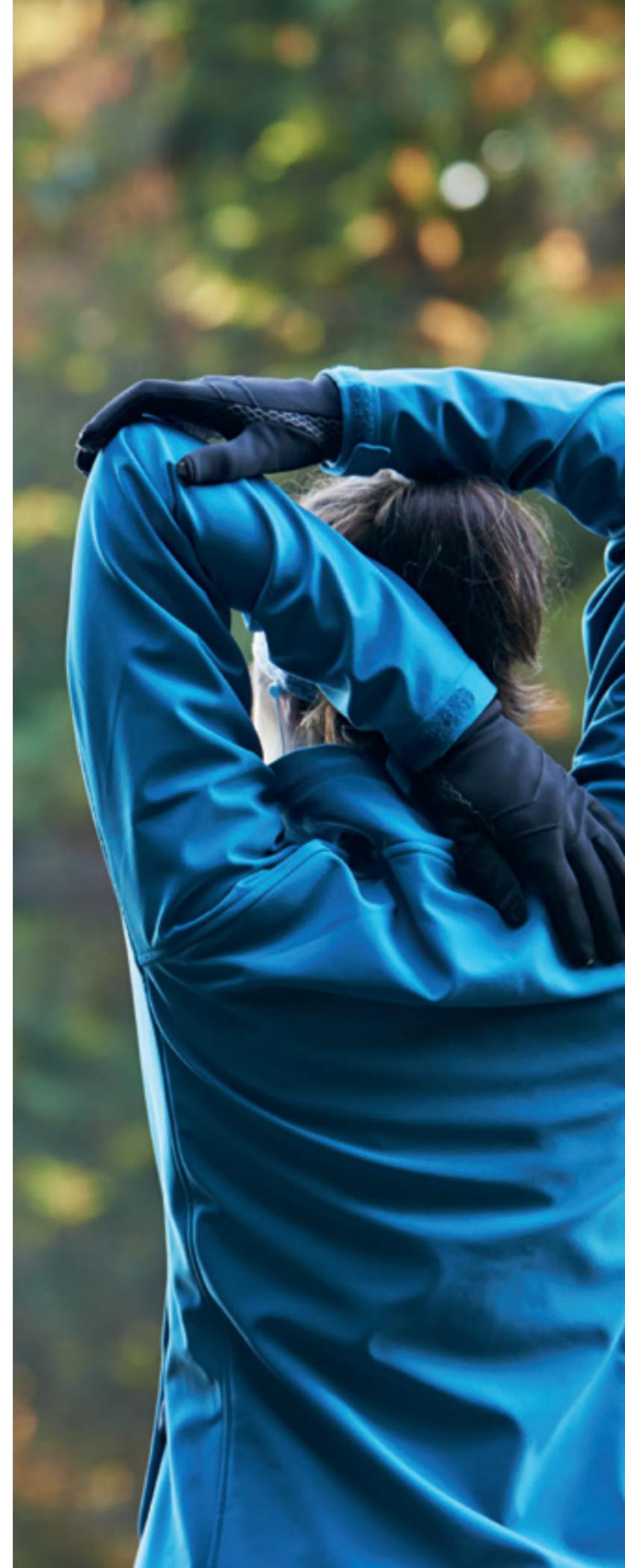
Here are some simple exercises to get you moving. Start very gently and gradually build up. Repeat each exercise five times and hold the position for 5–10 seconds. Do twice daily. Breathe steadily as you do the exercises. As with any physical activity, you'll need to use some common sense. It's normal to feel muscle ache but stop if you get any joint pain that doesn't go away quickly.



*Consult your doctor or physiotherapist before starting any exercise program.*

### USEFUL TIP: EXERCISE IN BED

*Start the day with gentle movement exercises to warm up stiff joints and muscles*



## FINGERS



Make a fist, then straighten your fingers

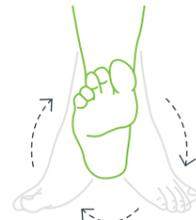


Bend the first two joints of your fingers down, then straighten again

## FEET



Bend your ankle up towards your body as far as possible, then point your toes away from your body

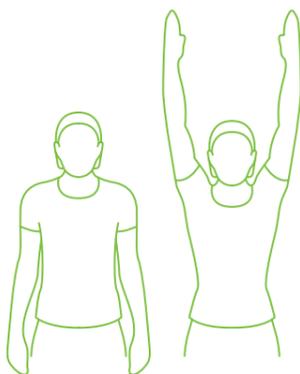


Move your ankle around slowly in a large circle. Repeat in the opposite direction

## SHOULDERS



Place your hands behind your head, then behind your back



Stand with your arms relaxed at your sides. Raise your arms as far as you can

## BACK



Lie on your back with knees bent. Bring one knee up and pull it gently to the chest. Push your back into the floor when doing this exercise. Hold, then swap legs



Place your hands on your hips and bend slowly to one side until you feel a stretch. Hold, then repeat on the other side

# 4 Eat well

When living with rheumatoid arthritis, it is not only important to move your body, but it is also important to eat well.

There is very little evidence that particular foods are good or bad for people with rheumatoid arthritis and there is certainly no diet proven to 'cure' it. Eating a balanced diet that is low in saturated fat, sugar and salt, but high in fruit, vegetables and cereals is good for most people. This can help you lose weight (if required), which may reduce the strain on your joints.

The Australian Dietary Guidelines<sup>10</sup> suggest the following tips that can help to achieve a healthy weight and improve overall health.

### Enjoy a wide variety of foods from these five groups every day

- Vegetables, including different types and colours, and legumes/beans
- Fruit
- Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties, such as breads, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles, polenta, couscous, oats, quinoa and barley
- Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, and legumes/beans
- Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or their alternatives, mostly reduced fat (reduced fat milks are not suitable for children under the age of two years).

And drink plenty of water.

### Limit saturated fat

Limit foods high in saturated fat such as biscuits, cakes, pastries, pies, processed meats, burgers, pizza, fried foods, potato chips, crisps and other savoury snacks.

Replace high fat foods which contain predominantly saturated fats such as butter, cream, cooking margarine, coconut and palm oil with foods which contain predominantly polyunsaturated and mono-unsaturated fats such as oils, spreads, nut butters/pastes and avocado.

### Limit added salt

Limit intake of foods and drinks containing added salt.

- Read labels to choose lower sodium options among similar foods
- Do not add salt to foods in cooking or at the table.

## ASSESSING A HEALTHY WEIGHT

These goals are a general guide. Work with your doctor to set your personal goals.

### BODY MASS INDEX (BMI)

How to measure BMI

$$\text{Weight (kg)} \div \text{Height (m}^2\text{)} = \text{BMI}$$

For example, a 75kg person with a height of 1.75m:

$$75 \div (1.75 \times 1.75) = 24.5 \text{ BMI}$$

### Risk Classification

BMI	Classification	Risk
Less than 18.50	Underweight	Low*
18.50 – 24.99	Normal range	Average
25.00 – 29.99	Overweight/Preobese	Increased
30.00 – 34.99	Obese Class 1	Moderate
35.00 – 39.99	Obese Class 2	Severe
40.0 or greater	Obese Class 3	Very severe

\* Risk of other clinical problems increased

### Omega 3 fats

Eating foods rich in omega-3 fats (a type of polyunsaturated fat) may reduce inflammation. While the effects are not as potent as some medications, they do not have serious side effects and provide heart health benefits too.

### Foods high in calcium and Vitamin D

Calcium and Vitamin D are both important to increase bone strength, and Vitamin D helps improve calcium absorption, as well as boosting the immune system. Low fat dairy products such as milk, yoghurt and cheese are the best way to get both of these nutrients, as well as green leafy vegetables.

### Limit added sugars

Limit intake of foods and drinks containing added sugars, such as confectionery, sugar sweetened soft drinks and cordials, fruit drinks, vitamin waters, energy and sports drinks.

### Limit alcohol intake

If you choose to drink alcohol, limit intake. For women who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is the safest option.

There are some food components and substances that may have some impact on relieving inflammation or controlling symptoms that you may experience from chronic pain.

### Fish oil supplements

Fish oil supplements are widely available in supermarkets and pharmacies in a range of doses. The dose needed to reduce inflammation is about 2.7 grams of omega-3 (EPA plus DHA) daily. This dose usually requires either:

- 9–14 standard 1000mg fish oil capsules, or
- 5–7 capsules of a fish oil concentrate per day, or
- 15mL of bottled fish oil, or
- 5–7mL of concentrated bottled fish oil per day.

It may take a few months to notice improvements in symptoms after you start taking fish oils regularly. If there is no change; speak with your doctor about other options. Make sure that if you use supplements to take pure fish oil rather than fish liver oils (such as cod liver oil). Fish liver oils contain large amounts of Vitamin A which can cause serious side effects if taken in large doses.

### WHAT ABOUT GLUCOSAMINE AND CHONDROITIN?

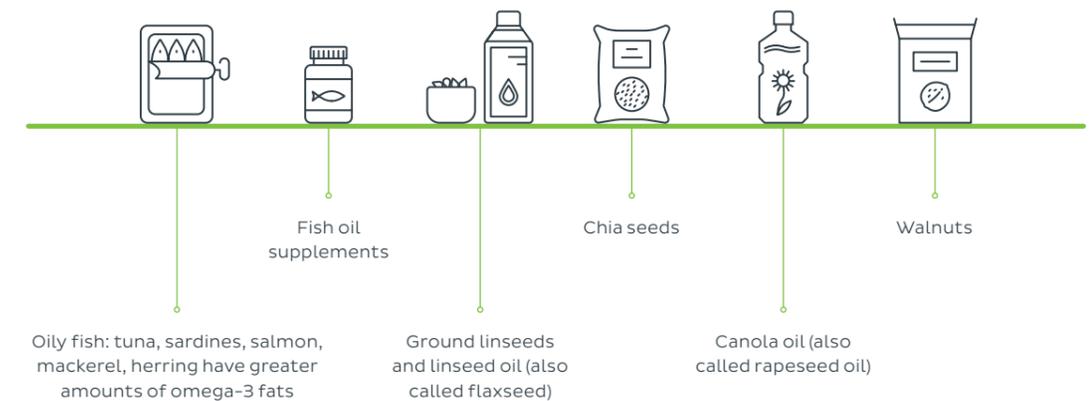
Glucosamine and chondroitin are substances naturally found in the body which are thought to be important components in building and maintaining healthy cartilage.

They are commercially available as supplements, which have been made from shells of crustaceans (in the case of glucosamine) or from cow or shark cartilage (in the case of chondroitin).

There is limited and unclear evidence that supports the effectiveness of glucosamine and chondroitin in reducing joint pain. Despite this, both supplements are relatively safe to take with few side effects.

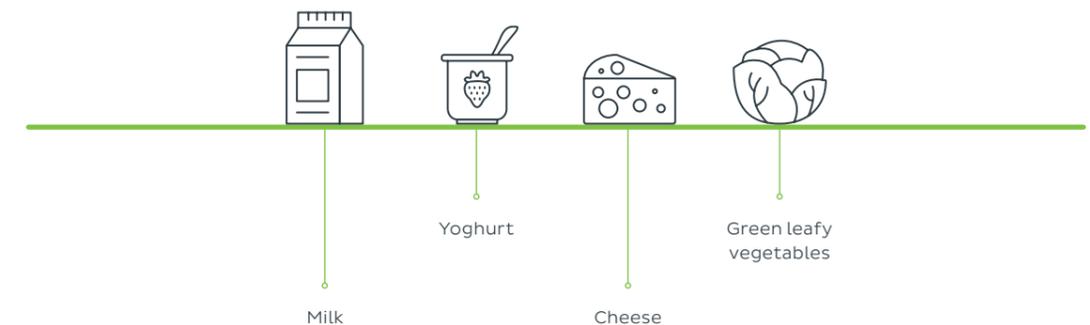
Speak to your doctor if you want to trial glucosamine and/or chondroitin to make sure you choose the right type and dose for you.

### FOODS RICH IN OMEGA-3 FATS



### FOODS HIGH IN CALCIUM AND VITAMIN D

Calcium and Vitamin D are both important to increase bone strength. Vitamin D also helps improve calcium absorption, as well as boost the immune system. Low fat dairy products and green leafy vegetables are the best way to get both of these.



### WHAT IS A STANDARD DRINK?



Please consult your doctor or Accredited Practising Dietitian before commencing a new diet.

## 5 Adjusting to life with rheumatoid arthritis

Many people with rheumatoid arthritis fear what the future might hold and are frightened by the impact arthritis might have on their everyday life.

Part of learning to live well with RA is to accept that certain things are no longer possible. To help you cope with the changes that rheumatoid arthritis brings you can:

- Find new activities and challenges that you can do with arthritis and that will give you satisfaction
- Get involved in community activities and doing things that you love can help to improve your mental health by enhancing your feelings of accomplishment, contribution and enjoyment
- Talk to people who have gone through what you are experiencing
- Talk to your friends, your doctor, a counsellor or a psychologist if you have strong feelings of loss or unhappiness.



### USEFUL TIP: PACE YOURSELF

Take frequent, short breaks. For example, do the activity for a set time, then take a short break, then do a bit more. You might find that by taking short breaks you will still be able to finish the activity without causing stress to your joints and increasing your pain.

## 6 Managing stress

Living with the pain, stiffness and fatigue of rheumatoid arthritis, as well as side effects of your medication, can be stressful.

The following tips can help you look after your mind and body, and reduce stress and its impact on your health.

### Identify warning signs

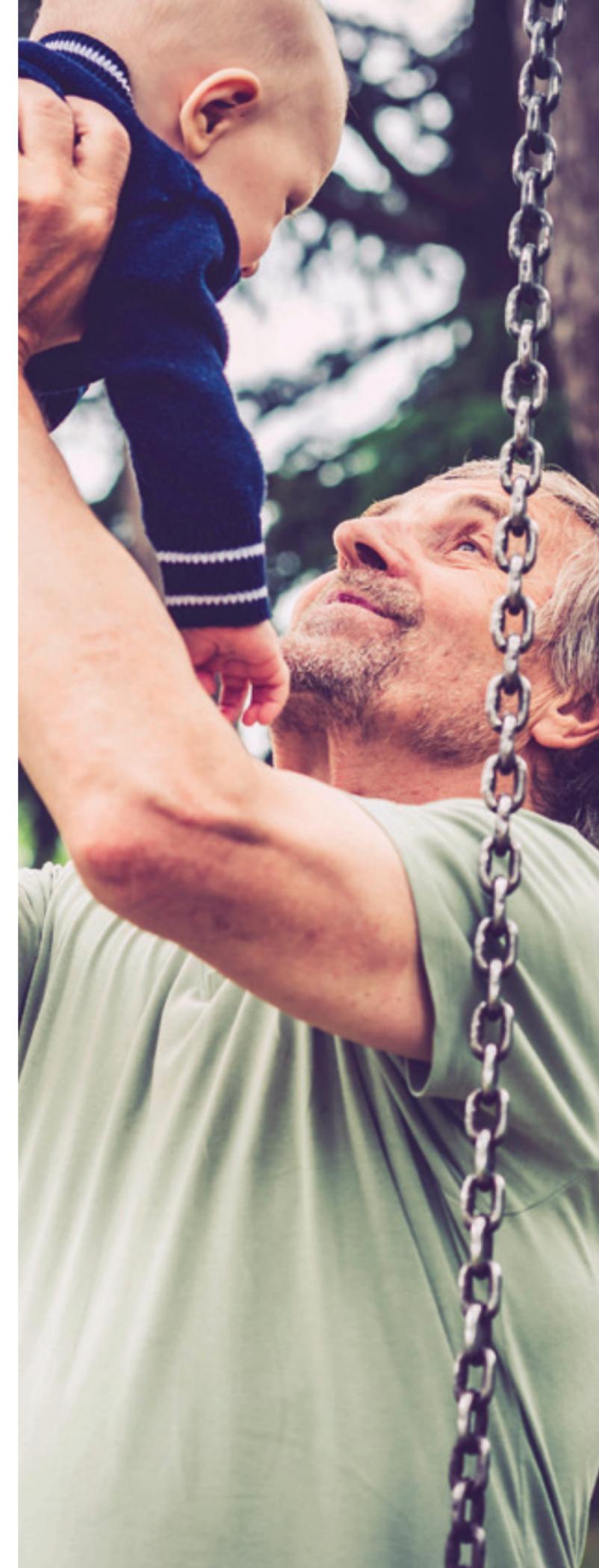
Learn to notice the signs in your body that indicate when stress is becoming a problem, such as tensing your jaw, experiencing headaches, irritability and short temper.

### Identify your sources of stress

These might include late nights, deadlines, relationships, financial worries or changing jobs. By anticipating, managing or even finding ways to remove the source will help reduce stress.

### Establish routines

Routines such as regular times for exercise and relaxation, meal times, waking and bedtimes, can be calming and reassuring, and can help you to manage your stress.



### BREATHING EXERCISES FOR STRESS

This calming breathing technique for stress, anxiety and panic takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere.

- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it
- Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth
- Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from one to five. You may not be able to reach five at first
- Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from one to five again, if you find this helpful
- Keep doing this for three to five minutes.

### DID YOU KNOW...

A stress journal can help you identify the regular stressors in your life and the way you deal with them. Each time you feel stressed, keep track of it in your journal. You will begin to see patterns and common themes.

Write down:

- What caused your stress
- How you felt, both physically and emotionally
- How you acted in response
- What you did to make yourself feel better.

### Look after your health

Focus on healthy eating and getting regular exercise. Take time to do activities you find calming or uplifting, such as listening to music, walking or dancing. Avoid using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs to cope.

### Connect to others who care

Share your thoughts and feelings with others when opportunities arise. Don't 'bottle up' your feelings. When you share your concerns or feelings with another person, it does help relieve stress. But it's important that the person you talk to is someone that you trust and who you feel can understand and validate your thoughts and feelings.

### Make time for fun and relaxation

Nurturing yourself is a necessity, not a luxury. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you'll be in a better place to handle life's stressors. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing can help you manage stress levels.

### Manage your time

Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. Try not to over commit yourself. Prioritise or delegate tasks to others if you can.

# Where to find more information and support

The best way to live well with arthritis is by working closely with your healthcare team.

### How do I find a health professional?

If you don't have a regular GP, speak to your local practice or medical centre.

To find a **rheumatologist**: your doctor will refer you to a rheumatologist – they will then stay in touch to coordinate your care. Your doctor may recommend a rheumatologist or you can also contact the Australian Rheumatology Association:

- (02) 9252 2356
- [rheumatology.org.au](http://rheumatology.org.au)

You will still need a referral from your doctor.

You may want to consider approaching a **physiotherapist** directly by contacting the Australian Physiotherapy Association:

- 1300 306 622
- Use the 'Find a Physio' feature on their website at [physiotherapy.asn.au](http://physiotherapy.asn.au)

To find an **occupational therapist** see the Occupational Therapy Australia website:

- [otaus.com.au](http://otaus.com.au)

To find a **psychologist** see the Australian Psychological Society website:

- [psychology.org.au](http://psychology.org.au)

### healthdirect

Trusted health information and advice online and over the phone, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Funded by the governments of Australia.

- 1800 022 222
- [healthdirect.gov.au](http://healthdirect.gov.au)

### Arthritis Australia

Arthritis Australia is the peak body and works on behalf of the nearly four million Australian living with arthritis. Learn more about arthritis and how to manage it by contacting Arthritis Australia.

- 1800 011 041
- [arthritisaustralia.com.au](http://arthritisaustralia.com.au)

Visit [www.empowered.org.au](http://www.empowered.org.au) to hear directly from people with rheumatoid arthritis and similar conditions on how they learned to deal with the emotional ups and downs of living with arthritis.

### Eat for Health

An Australian government website providing information, resources and tools about the Australian Dietary Guidelines and advice about the amount and kinds of foods that we need to eat for health and wellbeing.

- [eatforhealth.gov.au](http://eatforhealth.gov.au)

## About TAL

TAL is Australia's leading life insurance specialist, protecting people – not things – for over 150 years. Today, we insure more than 5 million Australians and in 2022, reached a new milestone paying \$3.5 billion in claims.

At the heart of the claims experience is you. Our goal is to help you lead as healthy and full a life as possible and help you get back to health as quickly as possible, taking into account all of your circumstances: your physical health, your mental wellbeing and your social support.

## TAL's focused on your health

Health and wellbeing is at the heart of what we do. From your physical and mental health, to your social and financial wellbeing – helping you be the best you can be is our number one priority.

We want all Australians to live a life as healthy and full as possible, because that's what living this Australian life is all about. Our focus on your health begins when your cover does. Working with you to keep you well and supporting your return to health, with a personalised plan should the unfortunate happen and you suffer an illness or injury.

Because your health and wellbeing is as important to us as it is to you.

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The TAL logo consists of the letters 'TAL' in a bold, green, sans-serif font. The 'T' and 'A' are connected at the top, and the 'L' is positioned to the right of the 'A'.