

MEDIA RELEASE

Young women urged to be vigilant and assess persistent back pain

NEW 'SPINAL ARTHRITIS' INFORMATION RESOURCE LAUNCHES

Young women are being urged not to ignore persistent back pain and seek medical advice, with improved assessments revealing an historical view that men are more vulnerable than women to a common disabling spinal condition known as axial spondyloarthritis is incorrect.

Even though axial spondyloarthritis is the fourth most common form of arthritis, impacting around 1-2% Australians (15-40 years old),¹ and includes ankylosing spondylitis, many have never heard of it. Traditionally viewed as a 'male disease', young women are being missed and are at risk of life-long debilitating damage.²

Unlike the better known osteoarthritis, axial spondyloarthritis is an autoimmune disease, causing inflammation that attacks healthy joints and tissues in the spine and pelvis. Back pain and stiffness are often the first signs of axial spondyloarthritis but if ignored, affected joints can deteriorate and potentially fuse, leading to severe, often debilitating pain.

Arthritis Australia are launching MyAS www.myas.org.au a comprehensive online resource to help people with axial spondyloarthritis understand their condition, how to manage it, and where to access support. They want to encourage young people, particularly women, to get their backs on track and seek guidance if they have persistent lower back pain and stiffness that is worse after rest.³

Recent research shows Aussies living with axial spondyloarthritis experience significant financial distress due to out-of-pocket expenses and time off work, including a 52% decrease in productivity and an average 2.5 days off work every month.⁴ This is heightened among women, who report more trouble managing work and daily living as well as greater levels of pain and fatigue than men.³

When properly diagnosed, axial spondyloarthritis can be well-managed with the right knowledge and treatment. Jonathan Smithers, Chief Executive Officer of Arthritis Australia, says, "It's vital those living with the condition are diagnosed early so they can be educated on what to expect and how they can manage it with support from their healthcare team. When armed with quality information and treatment options, people can make informed decisions and have a good quality of life."

Arthritis Australia Medical Director Susanna Proudman said "We are launching the 'MyAS' website, a unique go-to resource to empower those with axial spondyloarthritis to manage their condition and find the support they need. The resources have been developed in consultation with experts and people living with axial spondyloarthritis, to ensure the information is evidence-based, appropriate and accessible for all," she adds.

MyAS provides resources on symptoms, treatment options, working with your healthcare team, managing pain, mental health, and support services. The website has been designed as a roadmap to help people navigate their treatment journey and to access the help they need and deserve.

Anne-Marie Raymond (49) was diagnosed with the condition 9 years ago and is a health coach for people with the condition. She says, "Getting that strange-sounding diagnosis felt like a relief at first, as if the mystery was finally solved. But as reality set in and the pain didn't go away, I realised my journey was just beginning. Having quality information at your fingertips to stay on top of the condition and manage it well – is absolutely essential. Everyone should be able to live their 'best life'."

Issued on behalf of Arthritis Australia by Cube. For more information, please contact Anne-Marie Sparrow on 0417 421 560 or Nicole Birch on 0423 916 330.

More about axSpA

- Ankylosing spondylitis (AS) is a form of axial spondyloarthritis (axSpA), a type of arthritis that mainly impacts joints in the lower spine and pelvis. Many people with axSpA eventually end up with AS, which is characterized by a partial fusing of bones in the lower spine.
- AxSpA can also affect other joints such as the hips, knees and ankles and other organs such as the eyes, bowels and skin, causing debilitating discomfort and fatigue.
- There is no cure for axSpA, however, with an early diagnosis, the right treatment, and self-management, most people can effectively manage their axSpA.
- Regular physical activity and exercise is one of the most effective treatments for axSpA. It helps to reduce stiffness and pain, strengthen muscles, maintain good posture and improve sleep and overall health.

About MyAS

- MyAS has been developed with experts and consumers to ensure information is evidence-based, appropriate and accessible to consumers.
- MyAS is designed to help people with axSpA understand their condition and empower them to help manage it. MyAS provides information on symptoms, treatment options, working with your healthcare team, managing pain, mental health, and support services.
- By registering to the website, users can receive recommended content relevant to their experience with axSpA, access surveys to help keep track of how their axSpA is affecting them and link to patient support programs to access information and support on the medication they are taking.

References

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