

Arthritis

DEFINITION:

Even though Arthritis is often referred to as a specific disease, it is important to know that it is a broad term that covers many conditions that predominantly affect the joints.

Arthritis is inflammation of a joint, such as knee, hip, elbow or wrist, which significantly reduces a person's ability to mobilise the associated limb, and weight-bear effectively.

Although there are over 100 different types of arthritis including fibromyalgia and gout, here are two of the most common forms of arthritis:

Osteoarthritis – causes a breakdown of cartilage, which is the protective covering on the ends of the bones due to general wear and tear as the body ages.

Rheumatoid arthritis - is a disorder of the auto-immune system. It affects the synovium, the lining of the joints, which can become inflamed and swollen. There is also a risk that this disease can, eventually destroy cartilage and bone within the joint.

SIGNS / CONDITIONS

The signs and symptoms of arthritis relates to the joints.

Depending on the type of arthritis the client has, the signs and symptoms may include:

- Pain
- Swelling and/or stiffness
- Redness
- Inability to weight-bear

RISK FACTORS

Common risk factors for the onset of arthritis can include:

Age – the risk of developing arthritis increases as we age.

Gender – women are more at risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis.

Family History – the likelihood of developing arthritis increases if you have an immediate family member with arthritis.

Obesity – excess body weight places an increased strain on joints.

Joint Injury – people who have injured a joint have an increased risk of developing arthritis in that joint.

EFFECTS OF DISEASE ON PERSON

- Arthritis can impact on the person's ability to mobilise and weight-bear.
- Energy levels of the person may be affected and they may become fatigued easily.
- Severe cases of arthritis can make it difficult for some people to carry out everyday tasks, such as hold a knife and fork, sit for extended periods, or bend down to tie up shoelaces.
- People with arthritis may experience chronic pain, which can affect their mood and/or willingness to socialise.
- Arthritic joints may become twisted and deformed as the disease progresses.

ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Where Arthritis has been identified as a key consideration in the provision of care and support to an individual, the assessment by a case manager should focus on:

- The type of arthritis and the effects experienced by the individual.
- The person's ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle e.g. diets, exercise, socialisation.
- Note areas where the arthritis is limiting the person's ADL's, e.g. can they open a jar, use a can opener etc.
- Note whether the person is on medication for their condition, or if other health issues contribute to their condition.
- Note current strategies used to manage arthritis – when and where they are used, and their effectiveness.
- Note whether the person has an exercise plan.
- Note whether the person has a pain management plan.
- Identify any physical and social supports used by the individual to manage the effects of arthritis.
- Note the emphasis placed on the condition by the client, and the impact they perceive this as having on their personal and social activities.
- Provide opportunities for the clients to discuss the emotional impact of managing arthritis in daily life.
- Note that some individuals may be reluctant to accept help. It may be appropriate to state what can be done and describe the benefit, rather than *offer a service*.

CARE PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Where a case manager becomes aware of the need to provide support to a person with Arthritis, the following should be considered:

- Consider seeking specialised advice about the condition from Arthritis Australia.
- Consider seeking advice, or referring the client to, an Allied Health Professional – Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist.
- Do you need to assist the client with self-medicating due to arthritis affecting their hands?
- Does the client have a modified diet that you need to train staff to follow, or ensure the kitchen staff are aware of?
- Where the client is able to, or wishes to prepare meals, do you need to purchase specialised or lightweight equipment for cooking? †
- Do you need to provide support to assist the client to follow an exercise routine?
- Do you need to purchase mobility aids and equipment to support the client? †
- Do you need to provide extra time for the client to carry out tasks?
- Do you need to allow additional time for activities that include getting into and out of vehicles or walking around?
- Do your staff require education and training on Supporting a person living with arthritis to support the client effectively?

† Even where an organisation will be purchasing an item of equipment for an individual from their Home Care Package funds they should still receive assessment and advice from an Allied Health professional to ensure correctly fitted equipment is purchased.

This document is only intended to be a guide to some of the considerations when planning the care support for an individual with the identified health condition. It does not replace formal health care advice or referral to a Health Professional where required.