

## 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.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN HELPING SOMEONE WITH ARTHRITIS

- Be aware that while the person with arthritis may require help, they may also wish to tackle some tasks themselves, allow them the time and dignity to do so.
- A person with arthritis may find it hard to do up buttons or zippers, offer to help if they are becoming frustrated, but be sensitive about this. Report any changes in ability to your supervisor.
- A person living with arthritis may require additional time to move from one location to another, or to get into or out of a vehicle due to joint stiffness and pain, allow sufficient time during activities to cater to this need, always walk at their pace.
- The person living with arthritis may also tire quickly, allow time for rests and be alert for signs of fatigue.
- Where you observe the client having difficulty with their ADL's, such as preparing a meal due to cooking equipment being too heavy or being unable to open jars, cans or medication packages, refer this to your supervisor, they may be able to get equipment that can assist the person.
- Where the client cooks or prepares their own meals check that they are able to open any jars or containers, break the seal on items they will be using that day if appropriate.
- Monitor client's skin, particularly around the joints, and report any abnormal signs of redness, bruising or swelling.
- Encourage client to participate in daily exercise or follow prescribed exercise where appropriate and safe. Always follow the care plan.
- When taking a client with Arthritis out on a social support activity ensure the client has the required mobility aids or equipment with them before you leave for the activity.
- Ensure essential items are left within easy reach of the person to minimise the need for excessive bending and stretching.
- Know the client's care plan and follow any instructions relating to management of their condition. If you have any concerns relating the well-being of a client, report this immediately to your supervisor.

*This Document is only intended to be a guide to some of the consideration when providing care support to an individual with the identified health condition. It does not replace formal health care advice or referral to a Health Professional. If you have any concerns about the health status or the care support you are providing to the client, please contact your supervisor immediately.*