Working with Arthritis
Contents

About this booklet 3

The benefits of working 4
  Work and arthritis 4

Finding and applying for work 6
  Thinking about work 6
  Alternatives to full-time work 8
  Where to look for work 10
  Completing a job application 12
  Disclosing your arthritis 14
  Attending an interview 15
  Signs of a helpful employer 16

Government work schemes 17
  Work Programme 17
  Work Choice 18
  Northern Ireland schemes 19

Access to Work 20

Know your rights 22
  Your rights 22
  Health and safety laws 23
  Driving at work 23
  The Equality Act 24

Managing at work 26
  Workplace adjustments 26
  ‘Reasonable adjustments’ 28
  The importance of good posture 30
  Occupational health services 32
  Time off and disability leave 33

Education and training 34
  Training or retraining 34
  Further education 36
  Voluntary work 38
  Thinking of leaving work 39

Arthritis Care: here for you 40

Other useful organisations 42

Can you help us? 50
There are around 200 forms of arthritis affecting over 10 million people within the UK, and working with arthritis can be challenging. However, with the right information and support, it is possible to work successfully with a long-term condition or disability.

At Arthritis Care, we understand the impact of the condition on your life and work. This booklet has been created to give you essential information that we hope will improve your knowledge and confidence in managing your condition in the workplace.
The benefits of working

There is clear evidence that working can be good for your health, wellbeing and recovery from illness. As well as improving your income, employment can boost your confidence and self-esteem. This applies to adults of all ages, including people with health conditions and disabled people. Our health and wellbeing affect the people around us, so work can benefit our families and communities as well.

Work and arthritis

Work can be challenging when you have arthritis, but many people find that being employed makes them feel better. With the right support, arthritis can usually be managed at work – there is plenty of help available if you want to start or stay in work, including greater legal protection than ever before for jobseekers and employees with a disability.

An Arthritis Care survey in 2005 found that people with osteoarthritis in employment experienced pain less frequently than those out of work. Other studies suggest that work is therapeutic for people with conditions such as arthritis, helping them to better manage their symptoms. Keeping active through work can also improve your mobility, independence and quality of life.
Many employers recognise particular advantages to employing disabled people, including that:

- disabled employees have strong commitment and tend to stay in the job longer
- disabled employees have good punctuality and low absentee records
- it is often more cost-effective to retain an employee who has become disabled than recruit and train a new person
- staff morale may increase because an organisation that employs disabled people will be viewed as more inclusive
- the adjustments made to help with employing and retaining a disabled person can often bring benefits for other employees and customers
- employers who limit their workforce to non-disabled people are restricting their choice of finding the best person for the job.

A 2009 report, ‘Fit for Work’, released by The Work Foundation, found that well-designed work environments and flexible working arrangements can help people to stay in work or gradually return to work after illness.
Finding and applying for work

Thinking about work

Everybody has different skills they can bring to an employer. It is likely that from the range of jobs and working environments available, some will be suitable for you. The range of options is vast, and before you begin applying for work it is important to think carefully not only about what you would like to do, but what job or working environment might best suit your abilities.

If you are seeking a new job, or needing to develop or adapt your current role, it may be useful to consider the following questions:

• What things am I good at doing?
• What skills have I developed, both in and outside work?
• What activities cause me discomfort and pain that lasts more than a couple of hours or cause me to lose sleep?
• What would help me minimise or avoid these sources of discomfort and pain?
• How can I pace myself properly?
• How can I relax effectively?
• How can I make sure I sleep well?
If you have stopped work in the past, consider your reasons for stopping. Think also about the types of work and arrangements that would make returning to work possible or easier. You might want to consider how much physical exertion will be required or whether or not you wish to be based in an office.

Consider what kind of role you want, and the skills and experience you can offer. Employment experience is key, but so are the many important skills developed outside work, for example, as a parent or carer, on a work placement, or in your hobbies.

Living with arthritis can require a great deal of patience, planning and problem-solving. In many jobs these skills can be key strengths – for example, you may have developed innovative ways to carry out everyday tasks. People with a long-term health condition are often determined, resourceful and adaptable – qualities that are attractive to most employers.
Alternatives to full-time work

If you decide that full-time work is not suitable for you because of the way arthritis impacts on your life, there are a few alternatives.

Flexible working
Some employers are happy to allow individual staff members to begin work earlier or later in the day, or to work from home. All employees are entitled to ask for flexible working.

Job-sharing
This is one form of flexible working, whereby two employees share the responsibilities of one full-time job. Some jobs are advertised as job shares or you can suggest the idea to your employer.

Part-time work
Anyone working fewer hours than a full-time worker is considered to be part time. You might work three days a week, or five days a week but afternoons only. Part-time workers are entitled to the same employment terms as full-time workers (on a pro-rata, or proportionate, basis).
Self-employment

Working for yourself allows much greater flexibility in how, when, where and for how long you work. Depending on what you do, you may be able to work full time or part time, or even vary your hours according to your needs. For example, you may be able to reduce your hours when you’re having a flare-up. There are significant benefits to being self-employed, although it does bring increased responsibility too (such as paying your own income tax).

If you decide to start your own business, you can still benefit from various government programmes, such as Access to Work (see page 20). A JobCentre adviser can give you more information.

There is a wide range of information, advice, financial help and training available to help meet the needs of small businesses. Contact the Skills Funding Agency in England, the Business Wales Hotline, the Scottish Enterprise or your local JobCentre in Northern Ireland for more information.
Where to look for work

JobCentres

When looking for work, a good place to start is your local JobCentre or JobCentre Plus. These are official government agencies offering advice and support for work, as well as information on benefits.

If you are considered disabled, then you will be referred to a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA), who can help to identify your skills and assess how arthritis might affect your work. Every JobCentre Plus has a DEA, who can advise you on finding work, keeping a job and getting practical help through the Access to Work scheme (see page 20).

In Northern Ireland, help is available at JobCentres/Jobs and Benefits Offices. The Disability Employment Service there provides specialist help to disabled people, as well as to their employers. Special needs careers advisors provide support for young disabled people looking for training or work.
Other sources of work

There are a number of ways to find out what jobs or vacancies are available, including:

- local, national or trade newspapers and magazines, including their online pages
- recruitment agencies and online recruitment websites (an internet search will quickly lead you to many nationwide and local recruitment service providers)
- applying directly to large employers - such as the NHS, councils and voluntary organisations, which all produce job vacancy lists regularly.

To find your nearest JobCentre or JobCentre Plus office and view information online, visit DirectGov, or nidirect in Northern Ireland. See page 44 for contact information.
Completing a job application

Always allow plenty of time to complete a job application; it can be a lengthy process. Different employers have different application requirements. Many jobs advertised online will provide a link to an application form, which you will need to complete online. Others may request that you submit a CV, either by post or as an email attachment. It is important to follow the application instructions carefully.

In any application, provide as much detail about your work, training and educational history as is required. If the job advert includes a person specification or a detailed job description, make sure you address each point, giving examples of how you meet the criteria.

It can be a good idea to ask someone to check your application before you submit it. A fresh pair of eyes may spot something you have missed.

Always keep a copy of your finished application. You can then refer to it when writing other applications, or if you are called for an interview.
CV (curriculum vitae)

A CV is a prepared outline of your educational and professional history. It may also include details of your personal qualities, interests and experience gained outside of work. There are many different ways to construct a CV, and there are many websites, online resources and books that can guide you. Following a template can be a helpful start, but every CV is unique to the individual, so be flexible and adapt any template as necessary to give a true and positive account of yourself.

Many people produce a CV once and then use it for every job they apply for. It is usually more effective to tailor your CV to the specifics of each job you apply for, as it shows you have thought carefully about why you want it.

Always remember that your application may be one of several that a potential employer will read. Think of ways in which you can make yours stand out – perhaps by providing a neatly handwritten covering letter, or by demonstrating that you have researched the company you are applying to, not just the job.

arthritiscare.org.uk
free helpline: 0808 800 4050
Disclosing your arthritis

You might be worried that you will not get a job – or even an interview – if you tell a potential employer about your arthritis. Or you may just feel embarrassed and not want to draw attention to yourself or ask for help.

An employer must not ask you questions about health or disability, including about your sickness absence record, as part of the recruitment process. The only exception would be if an employer needs to know whether or not you can carry out a vital function of the job with reasonable adjustments in place. You have a duty to tell an employer about a health condition if it might present a health and safety risk to yourself or other work colleagues. Remember, you can only be guaranteed protection by equal opportunities policies and the Equality Act (see page 24) if your employer is aware of your disability.

In the long term, being open about having arthritis can create a more supportive and sustainable working life. Disclosing your arthritis may also help to explain any gaps in your education or employment on your application or CV.
Finding and applying for work

One advantage of being open about your condition in your application is that all employers are required by law to take reasonable steps to ensure that changes are made to where and how an interview takes place, should you need them. These might include:

- making sure that their premises are accessible
- ensuring that you get a choice about the time of the interview
- structuring interview time, for example so that you do not have to spend too long sitting down or standing up.

If the employer does not ask if you would like any adjustments for the interview, you can contact them yourself to request help.

A job advert displaying either of these symbols will guarantee you an interview if you meet the basic conditions for the job.

**Signs of a helpful employer**

Employers committed to employing disabled people are likely to display either a ‘disability confident’ or a ‘positive about disabled people’ symbol.

The **disability confident** scheme is a voluntary scheme offered to employers keen to employ and retain people living with disability or conditions affecting their health. If you have arthritis, the ‘disability confident’ logo (above) is a good indication that a potential employer will be sympathetic to your needs.

Also, look out for employers who have joined the **positive about disabled people** scheme (displaying the ‘Two Ticks’ symbol, above).* This shows the employer is positive about recruiting disabled people. Employers who use the symbol have made a number of commitments, including that they will interview all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and consider them on their abilities.

*This scheme does not operate in Northern Ireland.
There are a number of government employment schemes for people with disabilities who are seeking work. These include the Work Programme and Work Choice, or in Northern Ireland the Workable (NI) and Job Introduction schemes. Speak to a Disability Employment Advisor at your local JobCentre Plus or equivalent for more information.

**Work Programme**

The Work Programme is a payment-for-results welfare-to-work programme, delivered by a range of organisations – private, public and voluntary. It is designed to help those who are at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to find and stay in work. The organisations are paid for helping people find work; the more they help, the more they are paid. Participation in the Work Programme may be voluntary or you may have to take part if you are claiming certain benefits or if a disability has made it hard for you to find work. The programme can support you in training and work experience for up to two years. If you’re still on the programme after two years, you will have to go for an assessment interview with JobCentre Plus, which will help you plan for the workplace.

▶ See also Access to Work, page 20.
Work Choice

Work Choice is a voluntary scheme designed to help disabled people whose support needs cannot be met through other government schemes, including Access to Work (see page 20). This might be because you need more specialised intensive help finding employment (including self-employment) or to keep a job once you have started work.

There are three levels of help available to you through this scheme:

- **Work Entry Support** – Tailored advice on how to find employment and the personal skills needed to achieve this. Work Entry Support is available for up to six months, but can be extended by an extra three to six months in exceptional circumstances.
- **In-Work Support** – Help to stay in work. Lasts for up to two years.
- **Longer-Term In-Work Support** – Help to stay in your job longer term, with a focus on reaching a point where you can work without support.
Northern Ireland schemes

Work Choice is not available in Northern Ireland, but two other schemes are available exclusively in Northern Ireland that are designed to help you prepare for the return to work.

**Workable (NI)**

Workable provides a flexible range of long-term support to assist people with disabilities with substantial barriers to employment to find and keep work.

**Job Introduction Scheme**

The Job Introduction Scheme offers an opportunity for you to try out a job on a 13-week trial basis, when you or the employer may not be entirely sure whether or not it might be suitable. It offers employers a weekly grant towards the cost of employing you.
Access to Work

If your arthritis affects your ability to work, you may be able to get help from the Access to Work scheme – a government initiative designed to help people overcome barriers to starting or keeping a job. Access to Work can help pay for support you may need because of your arthritis, for example:

- aids and equipment in your workplace
- adapting equipment to make it easier for you to use
- money towards extra travel costs to and from work – for example, the cost of taxi fares if you are unable to use public transport
- alterations to premises or the working environment to make it more accessible
- a support worker.

You can apply for an Access to Work grant if you are aged 16 or over and have a disability or health condition that has a long-term effect on your ability to work. This scheme is available in England, Scotland and Wales (see page 19 for schemes in Northern Ireland). To be eligible, you need to either be in paid work already, about to start a job, work experience or a work trial arranged through JobCentre Plus, or you have a job interview lined up.

The amount you’ll receive under the Access to Work scheme depends on your circumstances. The scheme pays 100% of approved costs for anyone starting a new job. For those who are self-employed, the scheme will cover 100% of approved costs for travel, support workers and help towards other costs.
The grants are reviewed once a year. The upper limit for anyone receiving a Access to Work grant after 1 April 2016 is £41,400.

Under the Equality Act 2010, employers are required to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees, and Access to Work funding would not be made available to support these adjustments. Access to Work would also not fund the cost of any items regarded as standard equipment, standard business costs or standard health and safety requirements.

When you are applying for work, Access to Work may be available to you and you can mention it to your potential employer.

Although Access to Work grants are available for self-employed people, claims cannot be made for the usual costs of setting up a business, for example for the cost of purchasing standard equipment, training or courses.

Access to Work grants can help pay for a wide range of support – from computer software to support workers.
Know your rights

Your rights

According to the Equality Act definition of disability, you are disabled if your arthritis has had – or is expected to have – a serious effect on your daily activities for at least 12 months. The definition is broad and many people with arthritis will be covered.

Under the Equality Act, discrimination occurs where:

• a disabled person is treated less favourably than someone else because of their disability
• there is a failure to make reasonable adjustments for a disabled person
• a disabled person is victimised or harassed by colleagues or an employer.

If you are concerned about the way your employer is treating you, keep a record of particular incidents and correspondence. For further advice, speak to a Disability Employment Advisor at your local JobCentre Plus. You could also contact the Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS), or the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland, or your local Citizens Advice office. If you belong to a trade union, they should take up any issues with your employer on your behalf.
Health and safety laws

Employers have responsibilities to protect employees from harm at work, and to assess and address workplace risks in everyday and emergency situations. This applies to all your places of work, including if you sometimes work from home. For example, there are specific safety regulations for people who habitually use display screens at work. Employers must ensure that workstations are well designed for the task and for the individual. Employees must also take reasonable care of their own health and safety, and that of others around them – for example, by taking frequent breaks to adjust posture and reduce strain.

Driving at work

Your doctor will be able to tell you if you are fit to drive. By law, you must advise the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), or the Driver and Vehicle Agency in Northern Ireland, immediately if a health condition or disability affects your ability to drive in any way.
The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act (Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland) ensures that employers cannot discriminate against a disabled person in terms of recruitment or the provision of appropriate facilities so they can carry out their job. It is unlawful for an employer of any size to discriminate against a disabled person:

- in recruiting for a specific job
- in the terms on which you are offered a job
- by not offering you a job
- in the terms of employment
- in the opportunities for promotion, transfer, training or receiving any other benefit
- by dismissing you, or subjecting you to any other negative treatment.

Not all people with arthritis will be covered by the Equality Act, but if you have a significant mobility difficulty (such as problems using public transport or going down steps) as a result of your arthritis, you would be covered. Someone with loss of function in one or both hands, difficulty lifting everyday objects, or with chronic pain would also be covered. To fit the Equality Act’s definition of disability, your arthritis must have a serious effect on your daily activities that has lasted, or is expected to last, for at least 12 months.

Employers must treat disabled job seekers and employees fairly to avoid disability discrimination, victimisation and harassment. It is unlawful for an employer to treat you less favourably than others for a reason connected to your disability (unless this can be justified). This applies to all employers, except for the armed forces.

Employers also have to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to give disabled people equal opportunities at work. If you are at a substantial disadvantage compared with someone who is not disabled, reasonable adjustments should be made, and you cannot be asked to pay the costs of these yourself.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland can help you work out whether you meet the legal definition of ‘disabled’, and provide legal protection if you feel that you have been treated unfairly by an employer. Your local Citizens Advice can also offer more information and advice.
Managing at work

If you begin to experience difficulty at work because of your arthritis – for example, if you are finding it takes longer to complete tasks, you are feeling particularly stressed or tired, or you are struggling with getting to and from work – there is help available.

Workplace adjustments

Most people with arthritis manage to stay in work, although they often need help to do so. Talk to your employer, as it’s best to be upfront about your abilities and needs. Your employer will appreciate you telling them about your arthritis sooner rather than later, especially if you need to take time off work.

Sometimes even just simple adjustments to a workstation or routine can make a job easier and more comfortable. Try to make sure you take regular breaks during the day, stay mobile and maintain good posture (see page 30). Remember to take time out to relax at the end of the day, after exertion, or at the first sign of a flare-up. And try to make time for some sort of exercise routine to reduce stress and stay mobile.
Arthritis Care offers a range of services across the UK that help people to manage their arthritis – there is something to suit everyone. These include exercise classes for all levels of fitness; informal drop-in sessions; and coffee mornings, where you can have a drink and a chat with Arthritis Care representatives and others with the condition. There are also courses that teach you how to manage pain and regain control of your life; others cover fatigue, positive thinking, communication and goal setting.

Remember that an employer is required to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to enable you to carry out your job – see page 28.

See Arthritis Care’s website for course details.

See Arthritis Care’s booklet on exercise and arthritis for more information about how to stay active.
‘Reasonable adjustments’

According to the Equality Act (see page 24), employers must make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to employment practices and premises so that these do not place you at a substantial disadvantage. For example, if you are office-based you can ask for a workstation assessment.

Adjustments that can be made may include:

- providing or modifying equipment to help you work better, such as a specialist or adapted chair, wrist rests, a mouse and keyboard that support your wrists and hands, or voice-activated software
- allowing you to take short, regular breaks
- rearranging your work hours to avoid the rush hour; it may even be possible for you to work from home occasionally, or part-time
- moving your workspace to the ground floor or making it easier to get to your current working area
- reallocating duties that you find difficult to perform because of your arthritis
- having reasonable time off for treatment, assessment or rehabilitation.

▼ Many changes can be funded through Access to Work (see page 20).
Discuss with your employer things you are finding difficult. Talk to your manager, human resources contact, occupational health adviser or trade union representative. Alternatively, you can call the Arthritis Care helpline for free on 0808 800 4050.

Never be afraid to ask for what you need. Remember that it is in your employer’s interests to make changes, both to help you and to minimise the amount of time you need to take off. The benefits to an employer of retaining an experienced, skilled employee who has acquired an impairment are invariably greater than recruiting and training new staff.

Further advice and help on workplace adjustments is available from a number of sources. Speak to the Disability Employment Adviser at your local JobCentre Plus (or employment service advisers in JobCentres/Jobs and Benefits Offices in Northern Ireland); your nearest Disabled Living Centre (DLC); the Disabled Living Foundation (DLF); or Remap. See pages 42–49 for full contact information.
The importance of good posture

Learning to maintain good posture is essential to keep your back and spine healthy, and in turn, your muscles and joints. This is especially important for people who spend many hours sitting in an office chair. To ensure that you have good posture when seated at a desk:

- ensure your back is well supported, particularly in the lower (lumbar) region
- try to keep your head up and your shoulders relaxed – avoid slouching or hunching your shoulders
- your knees should be aligned with your hips or slightly higher while seated, and your feet should be flat on the floor or supported on a footrest
- keep your forearms horizontal and your wrists straight when typing, and try not to overstretch your fingers
- your eyes should be approximately the same height as the top of your computer screen
- if using a laptop for any length of time, try raising it onto a rest and attaching a separate keyboard and mouse if possible.
In any work environment, always avoid remaining in the same position for long periods of time – look up, stretch and move around regularly, even if only briefly each time. Take any opportunity you can to change your position, for example you might be able to stand up or even walk about when on the phone, rather than remaining seated.

Check your arm rests are at the right height. Your shoulders should be in a relaxed position while working. If they’re too low, you tend to lean towards your screen; if they’re too high, your shoulders will become hunched. Try to get a chair with removable arm rests, or remove them entirely.

Try to be mindful about your posture throughout the day – whether sitting, standing or walking around. If you can, check your posture by looking in a mirror, or by asking a colleague.

When your posture is good, your body will feel more relaxed. If you can increase your body awareness through all your daily activities, your good posture will quickly become a habit.
Occupational health services

Although employers are not legally required to provide occupational health services, many recognise the benefits of looking after the health of their employees.

Occupational health services employ physicians, psychologists and experts on the design of user-friendly equipment. Services can be provided in-house or externally, depending on the size of the organisation. They can evaluate reasons for absence, conduct health assessments, and give expert advice on all kinds of workplace adjustments. They may also help you plan your return to work – for example, advising a gradual return to work while you recover from an operation or a flare-up, so you do not over-exert yourself.

More information on the role of occupational therapists in supporting people in the workplace can be found from the British Association of Occupational Therapists / College of Occupational Therapists. See page 49 for contact details.
Fit note

As of April 2010, the fit note – or statement of fitness for work – replaced the sick note. Your GP will use this form to provide information on how your condition may affect your ability to return to work, which you can then discuss with your employer. Your GP will choose one of two options to advise that either you are ‘not fit for work’, or you ‘may be fit for work’.

Your GP will advise that you are fit for work if they think that returning to work – with support from your employer – will help you. They may suggest changes that will help a return to work, such as starting part-time.

Time off and disability leave

If you take time off work because of your arthritis, it is important to keep in touch with your employer and your doctor. Discuss how long you may be off work and any workplace adjustments you might need.

Some employers offer disability leave – paid time off work related to your disability – as well as sick leave. Disability leave is not a specific requirement of the Equality Act (Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland). However, it could be considered a reasonable adjustment. For example, your employer could give you special leave for treatment.
Retraining, further education and voluntary work all offer opportunities to develop your skills and keep active. They often offer more flexibility than paid employment, allowing you to change your hours and take time off if you need to. You should discuss any training or volunteering plans with your local JobCentre or equivalent, as this may affect your benefits.

Training or retraining

If you decide you want to update your skills or learn new ones, some employers may support your training, and there are a variety of government training programmes available.

Work-based learning programmes

There are several schemes in different parts of the UK that can help you to learn new skills, get work placements and gain new qualifications. If you are unemployed and actively looking for work, you might be able to get work experience and relevant qualifications at the same time.

There are many residential courses that lead to nationally recognised qualifications. If you want to become self-employed, you can get advice and support, and have
the chance to learn a trade, while still receiving benefits. Generally, to qualify for a training programme, you must be at least 25 years old and have been unemployed continuously for at least 24 weeks (disabled people may qualify earlier). You also receive a training allowance equivalent to your weekly benefit plus a training premium.

There are several voluntary training programmes in England and Wales available through JobCentres and delivered by nationally approved training organisations. In Northern Ireland, the disablement advisory service in JobCentres/Jobs and Benefit Offices can provide or refer you to specialist training. If you prefer the idea of training closer to home, you may be offered customised local training – ask at your local JobCentre or equivalent.

On a work-based training programme, you may be a trainee or have employed status. As an employee you may have more legal rights than as a trainee, and you will receive wages instead of the basic training allowance. Check with the Disability Benefits Centre or an adviser at the JobCentre/JobCentre Plus about benefits.
Further education

New qualifications can make you more attractive to potential employers, and learning is good exercise for the brain too. There are thousands of courses to choose from, whether you want to take an existing interest or skill area further, or try out something completely new.

Local colleges and universities offer a wide range of courses at all levels. UCAS is the central organisation that processes applications for full-time undergraduate courses at UK universities and colleges. They also have an online directory of courses on their website (ucas.com). The Prospects website is a good source of information on courses that are specifically work-related (prospects.ac.uk).

Careers advice

It can be a good idea to talk through your next step with a disability employment adviser (DEA) at your local JobCentre or JobCentre Plus; they will be able to advise you on your options. There are many other sources of help and advice, including:

• Learndirect – regional information on courses, careers and funding
• The National Careers Service (nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk) – information and advice on careers and work for people in England aged 13 to 19
• myworldofwork.co.uk in Scotland
• careerswales.com in Wales
• nidirect.gov.uk in Northern Ireland
The Association of National Specialist Colleges (Natspec) supports specialist independent colleges providing further education and training to meet the inclusive learning needs of disabled students (natspec.org.uk).

Learndirect operates a network of more than 2,000 online learning centres in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Its aim is to equip people with the skills they need for employability, particularly those people who have few or no skills or qualifications (learndirect.com).

**Support while you are studying/training**

Many universities across the country offer disability services, including disability support officers. The nature of the support offered does vary, but may include:

- arranging support providers, for example library assistants
- assisting with your application for Disabled Students’ Allowance (available to UK residents studying full-time undergraduate courses)
- promoting awareness of disability issues and liaising with faculty staff to ensure they understand your requirements.
Voluntary work

Voluntary work is one way of enhancing your skills and finding out about an area that interests you, and it provides an opportunity to contribute to society. Voluntary work often offers more flexibility than paid employment, allowing you to change your hours and take time off, without feeling worried that you may lose your job.

One good place to start is the do-it website (do-it.org.uk), a UK-wide database of volunteering opportunities. You can search for voluntary projects in your local area based on your skills and interests.

Note that you must tell your JobCentre Plus office, JobCentre or social security office if you do any voluntary work. They will also want to know if you are being paid in any way, including meal vouchers or travel expenses. These ‘payments in kind’ should not affect your Income Support.
Thinking of leaving work

If you plan to leave work because of your arthritis, consider whether your employer has made every effort to help keep you in employment. It is usually more cost-effective for your employer to keep you rather than recruit somebody else. If your employer can’t make adjustments to help you continue in your job, they should try to offer you another role if possible.

Disability advice specialists in JobCentre Plus (JobCentres/Jobs and Benefit Offices in Northern Ireland) are there to help employers adapt, as well as to support disabled people. So before you decide to give up work, see if they can help. To find your nearest office and view information online, visit DirectGov or nidirect in Northern Ireland. The Arthritis Care helpline and your local Citizens Advice can also offer advice.

If you are no longer able to do your job for health reasons you may be entitled to receive early payment of your pension. The details depend on your pension scheme, and your doctor will need to agree that this is right for you.
Here for you

If you have arthritis we understand how it can affect you, your life and those around you. Whether you’ve been recently diagnosed and want to find out more or you’ve been living with arthritis for a while, we’re here for you.

We believe there is always something you can do to reduce the impact of arthritis and look to the future with confidence.

There’s a free helpline, a range of services and free information leaflets and booklets that you can find on our website or order by post.

Talk to us

Talking about arthritis, sharing your concerns and how you feel can really help. Our free helpline is run by people with experience of arthritis who are there to listen and help you find answers to your questions. Our free, confidential phone line is open weekdays on 0808 800 4050.

We can:
• Help you with any questions you have about arthritis
• Help you understand the financial benefits that may be available to you
• Be there to listen if you need someone to talk to
• Provide you with information about staying in work
• Tell you about services and courses that can help you in your area
• Send you a range of free information leaflets and booklets.
Talk to others

There are Living with Arthritis services all over the country, often run by people who have arthritis with the time to listen to what’s happening in your life, help you to understand your condition and manage your symptoms better and talk through your options.

There are Arthritis Care groups and branches, run by people with arthritis, giving you the opportunity to spend time with others who share and understand what it’s like to live with arthritis.

Or you may prefer to visit our online community where you can chat to others with arthritis about the things that matter to you.

To find out more go to arthritiscare.org.uk, call the free helpline weekdays on 0808 800 4050 or contact one of our offices:

- England: 020 7380 6540
- Northern Ireland: 028 9078 2940
- Scotland: 0141 954 7776
- Wales: 029 2044 4155

Become a member of Arthritis Care and receive Inspire, our quarterly magazine on how to live well with arthritis.
Other useful organisations

General

Arthritis Research UK
Funds medical research into arthritis and produces information.
Tel: 0300 790 0400
arthritiscouch.org

SCOPE-DIAL UK
DIAL UK can give you details of your nearest disability advice and information service.
Tel: 0808 800 3333
scope.org.uk

NHS
NHS Choices: for links to NHS services in your area,
NHS 111 Service:
Tel: 111
nhs.uk
NHS Inform (Scotland):
Tel: 0800 22 44 88
nhsinform.co.uk
NHS Direct (Wales):
Tel: 0845 4647
nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS)
Gives advice and information to disabled people, employers and service providers and supports disabled people in getting their rights under the Equality Act
Tel: 0808 800 0082
equalityadvisoryservice.com
Equality Commission (N.I.)
Promotes equality of opportunity and encourages good practice in Northern Ireland.
Tel: 028 90500 600
equalityni.org

Business Disability Forum
Builds disability-smart organisations to improve business performance by increasing confidence, accessibility, productivity and profitability.
Tel: 020 7403 3020
businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

Citizens Advice
Independent, confidential and impartial advice on all aspects of rights and responsibilities. Website includes search facility to find your local office.
Tel: 03444 111 444 (England)
03444 77 20 20 (Wales)
citizensadvice.org.uk
Benefits

Disability Benefits Centre Helplines
Tel: 0345 850 3322 (for PIP)
Tel: 0345 605 6055 (for Disability Living Allowance if born before 8/4/48)
Tel: 0345 712 3456 (for Disability Living Allowance if born after 8/4/48)
Tel: 0345 605 6055 (for Attendance Allowance)
Tel: 0300 123 3356 (Northern Ireland: Disability and Careers Service)

Disability Rights UK
Provides information on benefits.
Tel: 020 7250 8181
disabilityrightsuk.org

Careers advice

National Careers Service
Provides information on courses, training, careers and looking for work.
General advice: 0800 100 900
nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk

Regional:
Scotland:
myworldofwork.co.uk
Wales:
careerswales.com
Northern Ireland
nidirect.gov.uk
Driving

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)
For medical enquiries:
Telephone: 0300 790 6806
(Monday to Friday, 8:00 to 17:30
Saturday, 8:00 to 13:00)
dvla.gov.uk

Driver and Vehicle Agency
(Northern Ireland)
For medical enquiries:
Tel: 0300 200 7861
(Monday to Friday, 9:00 to 17:00)
Email: dva@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk
nidirect.gov.uk

Health and Safety

The Health and Safety Executive
For health and safety information and guidance.
hse.gov.uk

The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland
For health and safety information and guidance in Northern Ireland.
hseni.gov.uk
**Education and training**

**Disability Rights UK**  
Tel: 020 7250 8181  
Disabled Students Helpline:  
Tel: 0800 328 5050  
(Tuesday and Thursday, 11:00 to 13:00)  
[disabilityrightsuk.org](http://disabilityrightsuk.org)

**Skills Development Scotland**  
Tel 0800 917 8000  
[skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk](http://skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk)

**The Association of National Specialist Colleges (NATSPEC)**  
Provides advice and guidance on further, higher and continuing education, training and employment for disabled people.  
Tel: 0115 854 1322  
[natspec.org.uk](http://natspec.org.uk)

**UCAS (The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service)**  
Application services across a range of subject areas and modes of study for UK higher education providers.  
[ucas.com](http://ucas.com)

**Prospects**  
Information on work-related courses  
[prospects.ac.uk](http://prospects.ac.uk)
**Equipment**

**AbilityNet**
Advice and support for disabled people on accessing computer technology.
Tel: 0800 269 545
[abilitynet.org.uk](http://abilitynet.org.uk)

**Disabled Living Foundation**
Advice and information on equipment.
Tel: 020 7289 6111
Helpline: 0300 999 0004
[dlf.org.uk](http://dlf.org.uk)

**Remap**
Provides specialised equipment for disabled people.
Tel: 01732 760209
[remap.org.uk](http://remap.org.uk)

**Rica**
Consumer guides on products and services for disabled people.
Tel: 020 7427 2460
[rica.org.uk](http://rica.org.uk)
Self-employment

Business Wales (Wales)
Tel: 0300 060 3000
businesswales.gov.wales

Business Gateway (Scotland)
Tel: 0300 013 4753
bgateway.com

Business and self-employed (England)
gov.uk/browse/business

Invest Northern Ireland
Free impartial business advice and information on starting up a business.
Tel: 0800 181 4422
investni.com

Skills Funding Agency (England)
Tel: 0345 377 5000
skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk

Scottish Enterprise
Tel: 0845 607 8787
scottish-enterprise.com
Occupational health services

The British Association and College of Occupational Therapists
Professional body for all registered occupational therapists.

cot.co.uk
For a search facility to find an independent (private) occupational therapist:

cotss-ip.org.uk/find

Volunteering

Do-it
UK-wide database of volunteering opportunities

do-it.org
Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It’s just one of our many publications that are free to anyone who is affected by arthritis. The challenges of living with arthritis are too often overlooked and underestimated. We’re here to change that. Now more than ever we need people like you to lend their time, experience and voice to help others.

Help us improve our information

We know that the people who use our information are the real experts. That’s why we involve them in our work. If you have arthritis you could help us improve our information. You can comment on a variety of information, including booklets and factsheets. If you’d like to know more about becoming a reviewer, email reviewing@arthritiscare.org.uk You can get involved from home whenever you like. You don’t need any special skills, just an interest in our information.

Share your experience

Would you be willing to share your story to help others manage the challenges of living with arthritis? Contact our helpline to speak to someone about getting your story online or in the media.
Raise awareness

Could you help raise awareness of arthritis by putting up posters and leaflets in your local community pharmacy or supermarket? Whether it’s minutes or days, whatever time you can give will really make a difference.

Donate

Arthritis Care and Arthritis Research UK have joined together to help more people live well with arthritis. Read how at arthritisresearchuk.org/merger. All donations will now go to Arthritis Research UK and be used to help people with arthritis live full and active lives in communities across England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

To make a donation all you need to do is visit arthritiscare.org.uk/donate or call us on 020 7380 6540

Thank you
We believe there is always something you can do to reduce the impact of arthritis. Call our free and confidential helpline. Talking about arthritis, sharing your concerns and how you feel, can really help.

There are free publications that you can find on our website or order by post. Or you may prefer to visit our online community where you can chat to others about the things that matter to you.

To find out more about arthritis and Arthritis Care call:

0808 800 4050
(open weekdays 10am–4pm)

arthritiscare.org.uk

Twitter: @arthritis_care
Facebook: facebook.com/arthritiscareuk
Instagram: @arthritiscareuk

Arthritis Care, Floor 4, Linen Court, London N1 6AD
Registered Charity Nos. 206563 and SC038693

Please check our website for up-to-date information and reference sources or call 020 7380 6577.

Arthritis Care is a certified member of The Information Standard. This means that you can be confident that Arthritis Care is a reliable and trustworthy source of health and social care information.