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Fighting fatigue
Tired all the time? How to recognise and deal with fatigue

Right on track
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...and welcome to the spring issue of Inspire.

Spring brings with it a wealth of promises – from lighter days and ever warmer temperatures to the welcome emergence of flowers and greenery – and it can be such a positive time of year. Take a look at our feature on page 11, where we’ve got plenty of ideas to help you make the most of the season.

If you’re affected by fatigue, however, every day can feel like an effort. But it doesn’t have to be that way – there are some things you can do to make life a little bit easier. Have a read of ‘Five ways to help with fatigue’ on page 6, to see if any of our tips can help you.

As ever, please write in or send an email with your stories to tell us what you’d like to see – we love hearing from you!

Enjoy the magazine,

Tracey Lattimore
Editor

DR SARAH JARVIS
is a medical writer and broadcaster. She is the BBC Radio 2 doctor, as well as doctor to The One Show on BBC One.

FAVOURITE BREAKFAST?
“I don’t usually eat breakfast, but at the weekend I love a big bowl of fruit covered in natural yoghurt and toasted seeds.”

CLAIRE LAVELLE
is a freelance health and parenting journalist. She’s also mum to six-year-old Amelia, who keeps her well and truly on her toes.

FAVOURITE BREAKFAST?
“Banana, avocado and a blob of peanut butter whizzed up with some almond milk – tastes like a pudding, but is actually good for you!”

PHIL LATTIMORE
is a freelance journalist and editor who enjoys distance running, making bread and playing bass guitar in his ska band.

FAVOURITE BREAKFAST?
“Homemade sourdough toast or bagels, smoked salmon, poached eggs and mushrooms. And definitely some good quality coffee.”
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Oily fish could ease osteoarthritis

A review paper that looked at the relationship between diet and osteoarthritis found that losing weight – if needed – and reducing cholesterol levels were both important factors in preventing the condition getting worse. It could also reduce the risk of getting osteoarthritis in the first place.

The authors found evidence to suggest that eating oily fish or taking fish-oil supplements could also be useful for those with osteoarthritis. This is because long-chain omega-3 fatty acids, which are found in oily fish and fish-oil supplements, are thought to help reduce inflammation. Taking vitamin K could be a useful addition to your diet, too, as it can help to prevent your bone and cartilage getting weaker.

Book review

“Arthritis is not a condition that only affects the joints. It affects the whole person. Similarly, yoga is not a practice that addresses only the joints. It addresses the whole person,” writes Dr Steffany Moonaz in the introduction to Yoga Therapy for Arthritis. Written for individuals, yoga teachers and medical professionals, the book explores how the mind-body connection that yoga offers can improve muscular strength, physical stability and stamina, while helping to calm the mind, balance emotions and aid pain relief.

Moonaz emphasises that yoga is for everybody, and demonstrates changes to postures so people can practise in a way that’s suitable for them.

Yoga Therapy for Arthritis by Dr Steffany Moonaz and Erin Byron (£24.99, Singing Dragon)
To those familiar with fatigue, the idea that it’s simply ‘feeling a bit tired’ is something of an understatement. The extreme exhaustion that characterises fatigue is particularly common in rheumatoid arthritis, and is thought to be partly caused by the chemicals that are released most intensely by the body when the condition is in the inflammation stage. This is known as a flare-up and can cause flu-like symptoms – one of which is fatigue.

“Fatigue is a feeling of overwhelming tiredness, lack of energy and weakness,” says rheumatologist Dr Sarah Rae, of BMI The Manor Hospital. “It impacts hugely on the person living with arthritis, affecting all aspects of their lifestyle, from family and friends to jobs and careers. That said, it can be managed – the trick is to achieve and build on small victories. These can be more successful and sustainable if you make good lifestyle choices, such as eating well and staying as physically active as you can.”

Your fatigue could be better managed by taking these five easy steps.

1. Get tested for other conditions
   Anaemia is often found alongside arthritis and is a common cause of fatigue. Anaemia can be caused by lack of iron in your diet, and this means your red blood cells can’t carry enough oxygen to the parts of your body that need it. “GPs are generally very good at diagnosing and treating anaemia,” says Dr Rae. “However, thyroid disease remains a major concern, because it can masquerade as so many other conditions. Dry skin and thinning hair
are common symptoms, alongside the fatigue and aching joints that people put down to arthritis. Your rheumatologist or GP should offer tests to check your thyroid function.” If thyroid disease is diagnosed, it’s reasonably easy to manage with the right medication.

2 **Check for vitamin deficiencies**

“Vitamin D deficiency affects most of the population. If you haven’t topped up your levels during the summer because of work or fatigue making you stay inside, you may be lacking come winter,” says Dr Rae. “This can lead to weakness of muscles, low mood and lethargy – all typical symptoms of fatigue. Vitamin D levels are often low in forms of inflammatory arthritis, such as fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. I recommend using a vitamin D spray under the tongue each morning – this gets straight into the blood stream.”

B-group vitamins and folate are essential for good energy levels and optimal nerve function, which are both important in fighting fatigue. Folic acid also seems to reduce the chance of heart attacks and strokes. Vitamin K is vital for bone health, which can improve muscle function and fitness.

3 **Eat a healthy diet**

While it’s tempting to tuck into comfort foods, your mind and body will thank you for giving the creamy pasta dishes a miss.

“A low-carb diet rich in plant-based foods, such as nuts, olives, beans, fermented products and green leafy vegetables, boosts gut health and strengthens immunity,” explains Dr Rae. “This is because a more diverse microbiome [the collection of three trillion microbes that live in the gut and aid the fermentation, or breakdown, of food] improves the gut barrier and prevents ‘leaky gut syndrome’.” This isn’t a recognised condition, but some professionals claim it is the cause of many long-term conditions, including chronic fatigue syndrome.

4 **Practise good sleep hygiene**

It’s ironic that those with fatigue often find their sleep is disturbed and unsatisfying. “Sleep hygiene techniques can be very helpful,” says Dr Rae. “Simple things such as establishing consistent times for going to bed and getting up, and sleep rituals such as screen shutdown followed by slow, deep breathing and stretching, can help.

“Japanese researchers found that a routine of holding and releasing tension throughout the body in a systematic way is effective in preparing the body for sleep. Start by stretching the hands for the count of several deep breaths and then gradually relaxing them. Next, clench a fist and release. Progress slowly down the body, extending out the spine while clenching and releasing the glute muscles in the bottom. Finally, stretch out the legs, releasing the knees and tensing and stretching the toes, each time releasing the tension over the course of four or five deep breaths.”

5 **Use the four Ps**

These ‘Ps’ are problem-solving, planning, prioritising and pacing. Use problem-solving to pinpoint activities that cause you to become most fatigued. This means you can plan your day around them, and rest before and after. That allows you to prioritise and save your energy for the things you enjoy, and activities you’ll be able to sustain for longer if you pace yourself.

**“LIFE IS PRETTY HECTIC”**

Sacha Maloney, 41, an office manager from London, was diagnosed with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE, or lupus) at the age of 26. She experiences the fatigue, joint pain and stiffness that are common symptoms of the condition.

“I have a busy job and I’m a single parent to my 15-year-old daughter, so life is pretty hectic. And I don’t always follow the standard advice, which is to rest regularly to avoid getting exhausted in the first place.

“When the fatigue is really bad, I end up falling asleep on the sofa until 3am, then drag myself off to bed for another couple of hours before the whole cycle starts again.

“However, I do find that exercise and cutting sugar out of my diet really helps. Pilates strengthens my whole body and I sleep really well afterwards, while an aerobics class helps clear my mind and gets rid of some of the nervous energy that keeps me awake – even though I’m exhausted.

“The trick is to keep good habits in place even through flare-ups – it’s really hard because you just don’t feel well enough to get to the gym. When that’s the case, I try to get outside for a walk, even just for five minutes. And I stay as positive as I can – I have a lot to live for!”

Read more about fatigue at versusarthritis.org/fatigue
I’m on Humira, and my grandson has chickenpox. Is it safe to visit?

Jane H, via email

Dr Sarah Jarvis answers:
I would strongly suggest you stay well away from your grandson for the next few weeks. Chickenpox, caused by the varicella virus, is highly infectious. It takes anything from 10 days to three weeks after being exposed to chickenpox to develop symptoms. It’s usual to have a fever, and possibly tiredness, a headache and/or tummy pain, for a few days before the rash develops. You can catch chickenpox from someone who has it from a couple of days before their rash starts until the spots have completely scabbed over.

Most people who have had chickenpox will be immune to catching it again. However, you’re at much higher risk if your immune system is compromised by a medical condition – such as blood cancer – or medical treatment. This includes biologic drugs such as Humira, which calms down your immune system, and many of the other disease-modifying drugs to treat arthritis. If you do develop chickenpox, the symptoms are likely to be more severe. You’re also at higher risk of developing complications, including inflammation of the brain (encephalitis).

You need to bear in mind that it’s not just your grandson who could pass it on to you. If he has brothers or sisters, or if his parents haven’t had chickenpox before, they could catch it and pass it on to you before they develop the rash. Chickenpox is caused by the same virus as shingles. You don’t ‘catch’ shingles – once you’ve had chickenpox, the virus lies dormant in your system for years. For some reason, it can be reactivated – drugs or conditions that affect your immune system are common causes. However, while you can’t catch shingles, you can catch chickenpox from someone with shingles, so you need to take the same precautions as for someone with chickenpox.

I have osteoarthritis in my hips and knees, and it has been suggested that I lose weight. Is there a particular diet I should follow?

Stephen, Derby

Lynda Attias answers: Losing excess weight can be very helpful for your hips and knees, as extra weight can strain your joints. The pressure put on your knee is five to six times your body weight, so even a small amount of weight loss can really make a difference. Eating healthily and trying to lose some weight can be great for your overall health, and can help with any pain you’re having.

We talk about a Mediterranean diet being helpful for osteoarthritis. This includes eating plenty of fruit and vegetables, pulses, nuts, and olive oil. It would also be good if you could include a few portions each week of oily fish, such as salmon, mackerel and sardines.

It’s important to cut down on saturated fats – which are found in processed foods such as cakes, pastries and biscuits. There are also health benefits to cutting down on full-fat dairy products. If you have a sweet tooth, you could try replacing sweet treats with plain popcorn, vegetable sticks and fruit. There’s more information about diet and nutrition in our Diet and Arthritis booklet (versusarthritis.org/diet).

Trying to lose weight on your own can be hard, so why not join a group? Setting goals with other people can be a great motivator. Many Versus Arthritis groups run sessions on nutrition. To find your nearest group, just give our helpline a call. A referral to a nutritionist can also be useful, so speak to your doctor about this.
Doctors these days are very aware of the importance of helping patients understand their conditions, but it wasn’t always so. Take juvenile idiopathic arthritis, or JIA. The term ‘juvenile’ is pretty clear – to get a diagnosis of JIA, symptoms have to begin before the age of 16. Arthritis is also a term most people understand; ‘itis’ is the medical term for inflammation – and, in arthritis, it affects your joints.

But idiopathic? That is one of several terms, including ‘cryptogenic’, that doctors used to use routinely when they meant ‘we have no idea what’s causing this, but we don’t want to tell our patients that’.

JIA is uncommon, with one or two in every 10,000 children diagnosed each year. To be diagnosed with JIA, you must have pain, stiffness and, sometimes, inflammation of one or more joints, lasting for at least six weeks. For most people, symptoms last much longer than that.

**Different types**
There are several forms of JIA and, typically, different types affect different people. For instance, about 50 per cent of children with JIA have oligoarticular JIA. This type affects one to four joints and mostly starts in girls under six years old. The knees and ankles are most often affected.

Polyarticular, which affects five or more joints in the first six months of having the condition, can be rheumatoid factor negative or positive. The negative form accounts for one in four cases, and is seen most often in pre-schoolers and 10- to 13-year-old girls. The positive form is less common and often affects small joints such as hands and wrists. Another one in 10 people with JIA has the ‘systemic’ type. This is diagnosed if you also have:
- a fever that lasts at least two weeks
- a rash that is changing quickly
- swollen glands
- an enlarged liver
- inflammation of the heart, lung or abdominal lining

JIA can also be linked with the skin condition psoriasis, or inflammation of tendons or ligaments.

As well as looking at the history of symptoms and doing a physical examination, tests to help with diagnosis include blood tests, X-rays and, sometimes, ultrasound or MRI scans.

The doctor will also want to rule out other causes of joint pain and inflammation, such as infection.

**The right treatment**
There are two main aims of treatment: the first is to reduce symptoms and the second is to put the condition into remission. This might mean having no symptoms, or having just the occasional flare of joint stiffness.

Disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs for short) have helped improve many people’s arthritis. There are two types of DMARDs: conventional and biologics. Both types treat the condition itself, rather than the symptoms.

The outlook for many young people with JIA is now very good, although it varies with the type of JIA. It’s also important to start treatment quickly.

DMARDs and biologics act by calming down the immune system and inflammation that causes symptoms. They can occasionally cause serious side effects, so people taking these drugs need to have regular blood tests and follow-ups.

Physiotherapy and occupational therapy keep joints mobile, and help young people to be as active as possible. If joints are inflamed, hydrotherapy (exercises in water) can reduce the pressure on them.

Exercise is one of the best things you can do to improve your symptoms of arthritis and it’s easy to build a couple of exercises into your daily routine. To learn how to include exercise in your everyday routine, visit versusarthritis.org/about-exercise

Read more about JIA at versusarthritis.org/jia
Write in

Get in touch! Send your letters to: Inspire magazine, 1 Cambridge Technopark, Newmarket Road, Cambridge CB5 8PB or email inspire@versusarthritis.org

Letters

You’ve been busy writing to us, tweeting and having your say in our Online Community

Loan moan
I have just read the letter in the winter 2018 edition of Inspire, concerning the response to returning loaned equipment to distributors.

When I tried to return the equipment lent to me to help after my knee replacement last year, I was informed that the company would not collect it.

I offered to take it back to the local address, but was told this wasn’t possible.

The company’s website said it was committed to getting as much equipment returned as possible. I asked what it suggested I do with the new toilet frame, and was just told to donate it to a local old people’s home.

I was so angry, I wrote to my MP. He answered very promptly with a copy of the letter and an answer from the NHS – but nothing from the company that supplied the equipment.

It has made me wonder how large this problem is over the whole of the country. It must be costing the NHS a fortune to replace all the non-returned equipment.

Elaine Bird, via email

Best foot forward
I was a state-registered chiropodist, with a part-time practice at home because of osteoarthritis.

So I was interested in the article on page seven of the summer 2018 issue of Inspire, ‘Best foot forward’. There is no need to spend between £70 to £80 for suitable shoes; that style is made by most well-known companies now.

I have two pairs of very pretty, all-leather (inside and out) shoes – that come in D-fitting and wider – for which I paid £24 in the sale.

Elizabeth Dickinson, Windsor

What you’re tweeting

“I’ll say ‘yes I’ll come out with you’, but sometimes I worry if I can do it. And that can cause quite a lot of anxiety.” Debbie, who has lived with arthritis since she was two, spoke to @ITVWales about how arthritis affects getting out and seeing friends.

People with arthritis are champions of survival. They are brave but fighting pain all day every day leaves you with little energy in reserve.

“I’m glad this is being shared so openly. I tell people I have arthritis not for sympathy, but so they know at times I have restrictions on what I can do or if I’m out I may need to stop and sit down for a while.”

Lisa Franklin

If only folk knew how degrading arthritis is on so many levels.

Peter Jeffries

Really glad this campaign is raising awareness, people always say to me “you’re too young to have arthritis”.

Kate Evans

Completely agree with you there!! Need to break the stigma around it and keep on raising awareness.

Amy
Try our tips to keep on top of your arthritis and boost your emotional wellbeing

WORDS: LOUISE PARFIT

And... stretch!
Try to do some physical activity every day, be it a short walk, gentle exercises, seated movements or a class. If you do a class, let the teacher or instructor know about your arthritis so they can suggest suitable changes if they’re needed. You may find that shorter bouts of exercise – such as 10-minute bursts three or four times a day – suit you better than one long session.

Go outside
Make the most of the longer days and warmer weather by getting outside and enjoying the fresh air. You could join the National Trust and combine a walk with a visit to a historic site, or have a wander round your local park, enjoying the sunshine and spring blooms.

Mindfulness and positive thinking

Mindfulness has grown in popularity over the past few years. It can reduce stress and promotes calmness, which can help you manage your pain. Some people find it useful to meditate and repeat a positive mantra every day. Make sure to keep up your interests and hobbies if you can, especially if they involve meeting other people. There’s nothing like company and laughter for boosting your wellbeing.

Speak up
One of the hardest things can be asking for help, especially when it comes to doing something you used to be able to do. But unless you speak up and ask, people won’t know you need support. Most will want to help you, whether that’s assisting you to put on a coat, offering a lift to the shops, or listening to your problems.

Time team
If life seems overwhelming, try making a list of what you need to do the next day. Then break it into times for activity and times for rest, so you have space to recuperate. If you can, plan social activities and chores at times when you feel at your best. For example, if your symptoms and pain get worse later in the day, do your shopping or meet friends in the morning. If you have a job, speak to your employer about flexible working. Working like this means you can change your hours to times when you are feeling your best – and you’ll be more productive, too.

Nature’s bounty
Embracing healthy eating is a great way to keep yourself feeling good and in tip-top shape. Check out some of our springtime recipes on page 19, and take a look at our feature on healthy cooking at home on page 16.
Back on track

There’s a huge range of wearable fitness gadgets on the market, designed to keep track of all sorts of activities – from walking and cycling to exercise classes and swimming. Here we’ve selected a few smart devices that could help motivate you to keep active, or even inspire you to set new challenges.

Words: PHIL LATTIMORE

**Fitbit Alta HR, £79.99**
**Best for:** Style-conscious fitness lovers
**What is it?** A smart-looking activity tracker from the brand that first popularised this type of personal fitness wearable fitness band. The Alta HR ticks the list for step counting, distance monitoring (though there’s no GPS), automatic workout activity recognition and calorie-burn calculation.

There’s also sleep-monitoring gadgetry and an optical heart rate tracker to keep tabs on your cardio fitness. It has a small but clear tap-controlled display that feeds info as you exercise, and reminds you to move.

It isn’t swim-proof – it’s splash-resistant – so it’s not suitable for pool activity.

The Alta HR can wirelessly connect to a smartphone/tablet device – via the user-friendly Fitbit app – to sync and display your detailed performance data.

It’s an attractive and solid fitness tracker that, with its heart-rate monitoring and sleep functions, offers more than simple step counting.

*Available from: currys.co.uk and johnlewis.com*

**Garmin Vivosmart 4, £119.99**
**Best for:** All-round fitness tracking
**What is it?** Garmin produces a huge range of fitness-tracker devices to suit most budgets and needs. The Vivosmart 4 is an attractive fitness and wellbeing tracker with plenty of functionality to encourage a more active lifestyle. It offers auto step counting, running and swimming trackers, and a wide range of gym fitness-tracking gadgetry to record your activities. Also, it features sleep monitoring with REM sleep tracking and can gauge blood-oxygen saturation levels during the night with its wrist-based sensor.

Other fitness and health monitoring tools include: wrist-based heart-rate monitoring; all-day stress tracking; a relaxation breathing timer; and a body energy-monitoring function to indicate the best times to rest and be active. Its integrated gadgetry and software can also assess your ongoing fitness levels, and sync with a Garmin Connect app on a smartphone or tablet.

It has a slim design with fashionable wristbands in multiple colours and a readable, touch-sensitive display that adjusts to light conditions.

*Available from: garmin.com/en-GB*
**Moov Now, £61.59**  
*Best for:* Simple movement tracking  
*What is it?* The Moov Now is a screenless, motion-sensing, multi-activity monitoring device that straps onto your wrist or ankle, and connects wirelessly to a smartphone or tablet device to work with a downloadable app. The sensors enable detailed movement-tracking data to be sent and viewed on the phone as you’re exercising or simply walking, while a range of audio and video-guided fitness coaching programmes can be followed on your smart device.  
Weighing just 15g, it can be used for monitoring running, walking, swimming (it can even identify the stroke you’re using), cycling and other activities. It can also monitor your sleep patterns and provides fitness updates, including calories burned.  
This device offers plenty of stats for activities. However, as it doesn’t have a screen, it doesn’t give immediate feedback, so may not appeal to everyone, particularly if you’re just after a step counter.  
*Available from: amazon.co.uk*

**Huawei Band 2 Pro, £39.99**  
*Best for:* Wallet-friendly fitness  
*What is it?* A neatly designed slimline wristband fitness and activity tracker that’s a good-value buy. It features built-in GPS for location tracking, as well as step counting, sleep monitoring, heart-rate monitoring, and a breathing-coach feature. It also has a running coach - should you be more active – and can record and sync your data with a smartphone app. A small but readable screen keeps you informed of your activities or heart rate, and it’s swim-proof.  
The Band 2 Pro can also be controlled by touch or wrist movement gestures. An entry-level fitness tracker that’s great for swimmers.  
*Available from: johnlewis.com*

**Apple Watch Series 4, from £399**  
*Best for:* Those who want it all  
*What is it?* The Apple Watch offers far, far more functionality than your average activity tracker – with a price that reflects this. But if you’ve got the budget and desire for a high-end smartwatch, this device can provide a dazzling array of apps to monitor fitness, health and wellbeing.  
Its built-in sensors and GPS enable it to track all types of activities, such as walking, cycling, running, swimming, gym workouts, yoga and hiking. It has a user-friendly touch-control system, along with detailed graphics and a screen that’s easy to read. It has an integrated electrocardiogram heart-rate monitor that provides fitness tracking and an alert for low and high heart rates, plus fall-detection and emergency SOS notification options.  
It’s available with a snazzy range of wristbands and finishes, and offers a range of alerts, controls and different functions when hooked up to an iPhone or iPad.  
A device for people who primarily want a high-end, do-it-all smartwatch, rather than simply a fitness tracker – though the Apple Watch does offer a fantastic health and fitness package.  
*Available from: apple.com/uk*

**Xiaomi Mi Band 3, £27**  
*Best for:* Those on a budget  
*What is it?* A budget fitness-tracking wristband that’s a good value option for people who are looking for a more basic device. Its movement sensors offer a step counter for walking or running, and there are heart-rate sensor and sleep-monitoring functions built in. It has a small, swipe-controlled screen that displays data (and the time), and with a lightweight, slimline silicone wristband, it weighs just 20g. Battery life is around 20 days between charges and it’s waterproof. The device will also sync with a smartphone Mi Fit app, so you can keep track of your activities. Great for people looking for a fitness tracker that supplies the basics – plus a bit more – at a wallet-friendly price.  
*Available from: amazon.co.uk*
Get involved!

Versus Arthritis works with – and for – people who have any type of arthritis. We are here to help you manage your condition better, and stay active, independent and connected.

Support us at your event

Are you celebrating a special occasion this year? A big birthday, anniversary or getting married, perhaps? If so, you could support Versus Arthritis as part of your celebration.

Whether it’s organising a collection at your event or asking friends and family for donations in lieu of gifts, your help could aid others in the fight against arthritis.

For more information and to request material, contact the community fundraising team at localfundraising@versusarthritis.org or call 0300 790 0405

Get active in North Wales

If you are living with arthritis in Wrexham, Flintshire or Conwy and want to get active, then you’re in luck. New ‘Get Active’ activity and support groups have opened in all three locations, giving you the chance to meet new people and take part in fun activities.

These include chair-based exercises, tai chi, walking and boccia. They’re also an opportunity to hear from guest speakers and have a chat over a cup of tea with like-minded people.

For further details, contact Christine Heathcote on 0800 756 3970 or Jenni Edwards on 01244 952683. You can also email getactive@versusarthritis.org

Great leadership to great healthcare

In November 2018, 14 healthcare professionals started a leadership training programme to become Versus Arthritis Champions of Musculoskeletal (MSK) care.

Their aim is to improve patient care for everyone living with arthritis, and projects so far have included improvements to data collection and the development of physical activity programmes. Building on the success of 2018, we’re recruiting more inspirational leaders from across the UK to become MSK Champions.

Our aim is to improve the quality of life of people living with arthritis and related conditions. Do you know a healthcare professional who could be an MSK champion?

For more information, visit versusarthritis.org/msk-champions or contact champions@versusarthritis.org

It’s Foyle and Lisburn Versus Arthritis!

People with arthritis and related conditions have gained two new support groups in Northern Ireland. Foyle and Lisburn Versus Arthritis support groups offer a friendly space to take part in activities, and to talk to people who understand.

Both groups arose from a six-week Living Well With Pain programme. Everyone had gained so much from each other that they continued to meet up, and have been encouraging people from their local area to join.

For more info, contact John McCormick on 028 9078 2940.

Get vlogging!

The England Young People and Families team are offering a new vlogging workshop to those aged 16 to 25 in April 2019. Run by Media Trust, it will teach young people how to voice their opinions in a way that can get them noticed. Participants will also gain skills to create powerful vlogs using their smartphone, and learn how to share their content across YouTube in a safe and responsible way.

Young people who live, work or study in London or Essex can also submit their best vlog into the 2019 Vlogstar Challenge competition, for the chance to visit YouTube for a day of tuition and mentoring in July 2019.

To find out more, email ypf@versusarthritis.org

Do it
We create content that anyone can understand

From leaflets and booklets to AI and Inspire, the Versus Arthritis content team produces vital information for people with arthritis – so what drives them?

As told to: PHIL LATTIMORE

We have a managing editor, three senior content editors, three content editors, an editorial assistant and an information officer. We’re spread out between London, Chesterfield, and Leeds. Before Arthritis Care and Arthritis Research UK merged last November, we were two fairly small teams. Since then, we’ve combined and recruited more members. Our focus has been ensuring we reflect the best information from both charities and continue creating content that anyone can understand.

We produce around 90 titles. We deliver public-facing health information for people with arthritis and related conditions. This ranges from publications on the most common conditions – such as osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis – through to leaflets on therapies and medication. These are also available on our website, versusarthritis.org

We have a virtual assistant to help people online. It’s an artificial intelligence software system that can address queries from people about their condition anonymously. We work with IBM Watson technology and it’s really pushing the boundaries of how people access information on their condition.

Two people in the team have arthritis. We’re all motivated by our desire to help people. Our team includes trained journalists, who are well-versed in storytelling, and getting across facts in a clear, concise way.

Feedback is vitally important. We really like it when people tell us what we’re doing right and when we’re not quite hitting the mark. We also ask for feedback from patient reviewers. We work with healthcare professionals, patient reviewers and our helpline team to ensure what we produce is accurate, easy to understand and useful.

It’s so rewarding when Inspire readers tell us they have read an article that helped them. Many people who receive Inspire feel isolated because of their condition, so if they can connect to people sharing a similar experience, that’s really valuable. Moments like that make you feel we’re doing something good.

We want to help people make the right decisions about their health. There’s so much material online that isn’t necessarily correct. We can give people a steer to make positive changes in their lives and information that can help them and their loved ones. That’s why we do what we do.

Can you help us?

We want all of our health information to be useful and relevant for people with arthritis and related conditions. That’s why we want your opinion on our information, and how we can make it better.

We are currently recruiting people to our reviewer panel, to help shape the information we provide. This could involve reading and commenting on booklets or web content, to reviewing videos.

You don’t need to have medical knowledge. In fact, it helps if you don’t. Being a reviewer is voluntary, and you can review as much or as little as you want.

You don’t need to have a computer to review our content, either – we can post documents to you.

If you are interested in joining our reviewer panel, please send an email to content@versusarthritis.org or write to us at Content Team, Versus Arthritis, Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London, EC1N 8TS.

versusarthritis.org
Healthy eating made easy

Home cooking is great if you can manage it, but arthritis can make it challenging. Follow our expert tips to make it easier to whip up healthy and nutritious dishes

Words: Georgina Maric

Cooking at home can be a really enjoyable experience, especially if you use fresh, seasonal ingredients. Not only can it save you money compared with buying ready meals, but it can also help to improve your health if you’re using low-fat and low-sugar recipes.

When your movement is restricted, however, it can feel like all that preparation is more trouble than it’s worth. But with the right tools and techniques, cooking can be a confidence-booster, giving you a real sense of achievement.

You will also reap the nutritional rewards if you choose your ingredients wisely – and it can help you maintain a healthy weight, as you’ll know exactly what’s going into your meals. Follow our tips on making healthy cooking at home a little bit easier.

1 Sit down
Set up prepping and cooking stations in your kitchen, so everything is on hand and at the right level. “Look at the task and see how you can break it down to individual components, so that you can conserve your energy,” says Paul Cooper, occupational therapist and professional adviser for the Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCoT).

“There are simple things you could do. For instance, if your bowls, knives and chopping boards are all in different areas of the kitchen, pull them into one useful area. That way, you don’t have to move around very much, making cooking that bit easier.

SPICE IT UP
Some spices can help with the symptoms of arthritis, while others don’t have much of an effect.

**Turmeric**
Current studies are too small to say whether this is an effective anti-inflammatory treatment. However, there is ‘compelling justification’ for using it with other treatments.

There could be larger clinical trials in the future, which may result in it being accepted as a standard treatment. By heating turmeric, it can pass through your blood stream and to the immune system, which can reduce inflammation and pain.

**Garlic**
Human studies have not yet proven how well garlic works for treating inflammation, but it is used as a supplement. However, there is evidence from non-human studies to support its use. Garlic works better as an anti-inflammatory if eaten raw or fresh.

**Ginger**
A number of studies suggest that ginger supplements have a moderate effect on reducing osteoarthritis pain. The results are not robust enough to recommend it as a treatment, but worth considering – and it gives cooking a very distinctive flavour.
“Have an area where you can sit down and work on the kitchen counter, or have a low table and chair, so you don’t have to stand for long periods. You can request an assessment for a perching stool from your local authority.” To do this, contact your local authority or council and ask for a needs assessment.

More information can be found on our website – versusarthritis.org/campaign-with-us – or by calling the Arthritis Helpline on 0800 5200 520.

2 Slicing and dicing
Fruit and vegetables are the mainstay of a healthy diet, and make dishes tasty. Many are also packed with nutrients – but all that chopping can be off-putting. “You can buy pre-cut vegetables and fruit, but this can be expensive,” says Cooper.

Frozen fruit and veg are already chopped and ready to be cooked, and are much cheaper. They’re also great nutritionally. According to a recent study by the University of Georgia, when it comes to nutritional value “frozen produce outperformed ‘fresh-stored’ more than ‘fresh-stored’ outperformed frozen”.

There are cooking aids that can help you too, says Cooper. “You can buy adapted cutlery that you can grip more easily, and a chopping board with spikes at the bottom – called a Swedish board – that’s supported so it doesn’t move around. The Living Made Easy website (livingmadeeasy.org.uk), set up by the Disabled Living Foundation, has a range of equipment that can help you.”

Keeping your knives sharp will help make cutting easier, too.

3 Cook smart
Slow cookers can do all the work for you; you can throw in meat and/or veg and let the cooker do the rest. If you buy liners from supermarkets, you don’t have to clean it out every time, either. Another way of avoiding cooking every day is to batch cook and refrigerate or freeze meals.

“If you struggle to cook, but still want to eat homemade meals, one way is to cook a big meal – or several if you have the energy on that day – then divide them up and freeze them,” says Cooper. “That way, on the other days in the week, you can use your energy to go out and socialise, or do an activity. Your meals will already be prepared – just get them out of the fridge when you need them.”

4 Keep it sociable
“Cooking doesn’t have to be a lonely task – it can be great for social interaction,” says Cooper. “You could invite friends into your kitchen while you are cooking for them. If you enjoy the process, you could also look for local cooking groups.”

HELPING HAND

Kitchen/herb scissors with soft cushioned handles; sharp enough to cut meat and vegetables, OXO, £16

3-blade hand-held spiraliser creates vegetable ‘pasta’ in three sizes; can be used for long and round vegetables, OXO, £22

Vegetable chopper with easy-pour opener chops onions, peppers and more in one movement, with a lid that provides leverage, OXO, £20
I’m sure we’ve all had time to digest the impact of the Versus Arthritis advertising campaign, whether on TV, posters, or in newspapers and magazines. I’ve heard a lot of very positive feedback, which has been extremely encouraging, especially when it comes from people who are experiencing arthritis for the first time. The message that it’s not just aches and pains – and that arthritis is not something that just affects older people – really seemed to hit home. The challenge now will be to continue that good work.

Campaigns like this rely on a memorable image, and I was struck by the impact of that outstretched hand. If you’re ‘versus’ something, you’re opposed to it, you’re seeking to stop it, you’re holding up a hand and saying “no more”. But I think it resonated beyond that, because for anyone who’s experienced arthritis in their hands and wrists – and that was where mine hit hardest – they know that the simple movement of holding up a hand like that can be almost impossible on a bad day.

I remember having to wear a splint overnight to help keep the carpal tunnel in my wrists open. I remember the pins and needles that I felt in my hands when even the splints didn’t sufficiently stop the effects of the joint inflammation. I remember the effort involved in not just holding up my hand, but also in stretching the hand open so that my fingers were fully extended. How simple a movement it should have been; how difficult and painful a movement it could be if the joints were misbehaving.

Perhaps I’m getting ahead of myself in my hopes for what lies ahead, but we can’t be too far away from the moment when science and campaigning combine to produce the end result we all desire. That’s when the outstretched hand will send out a different, more positive message.

Julian Worricker has psoriatic arthritis. He is a TV and radio presenter and journalist, and currently presents the BBC News channel’s rolling news and the BBC World Service’s Weekend World Today.
Take five

Try these delicious vegan dishes – using just five ingredients in each recipe

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Teriyaki tofu stir-fry

**Ingredients**
- 200g firm tofu
- 3 tbsp teriyaki sauce
- 1 red pepper, deseeded and cut into thin strips
- 4 spring onions, cut into thin strips
- 250g pouch of long-grain or basmati rice

Basis: rapeseed oil

**Method**

1. Place the tofu between two pieces of kitchen paper and put a chopping board or heavy weight on top. Leave for at least 10 minutes, to remove excess water, then cut into bite-sized cubes.

2. Put the tofu cubes in a bowl and stir in one tablespoon of teriyaki sauce until coated.

3. Heat one tablespoon of rapeseed oil in a wok or frying pan over a high heat and add the tofu. Reduce the heat slightly and cook for three to four minutes, turning occasionally, until the tofu is lightly browned on all sides.

4. Add the pepper and most of the spring onions, reserving a few for garnish. Cook for two to three minutes until softened, then stir in the remaining teriyaki sauce. Stir to coat, then remove from the heat.

5. Meanwhile, cook the rice according to the instructions. Divide the rice between two plates and serve the stir-fry on top, garnished with the reserved spring onions if you like.
Pea and fresh mint falafel

Makes 16 falafel

Ingredients
250g frozen peas
400g can chickpeas, drained well and rinsed
2-3 tsp harissa paste
4 tbsp chopped mint
100g plain vegan yoghurt
Basics: salt and black pepper, rapeseed oil

Method
1. Place the peas in a heatproof bowl and pour over some boiling water. Leave to stand for two to three minutes to defrost, then drain well.

2. Place the chickpeas, peas, harissa paste and two tablespoons of the mint in a food processor and season well with salt and black pepper. Pulse until well combined.

3. Divide the chickpea mixture into 16 and roll into balls, then flatten slightly. Cover and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.

4. Heat the oven to 190°C/170°C fan/375°F/gas mark 5. Brush a large baking tray with a little rapeseed oil.

5. Place the falafel on the baking tray and bake for 15 minutes until crisp.

6. Meanwhile, place the yoghurt in a small bowl, add the remaining mint and season to taste. Serve the falafel with the yoghurt dip.
Salted chocolate fudge brownies
Makes 16 brownies

Ingredients
2 tbsp ground flaxseeds
150g dark chocolate chips or chocolate, broken into small pieces (70 per cent cocoa solids)
125g vegan spread, suitable for baking
200g golden caster sugar
100g plain flour
Basics: salt

Method
1 Heat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan 350°F/gas mark 4. Grease the base of an 18-20cm square cake tin and line with baking paper.

2 In a small bowl, combine the flaxseeds with five tablespoons of cold water, stir well and set to one side.

3 Melt the chocolate in a heatproof bowl over a saucepan of simmering water, stirring occasionally, or in the microwave. Remove from the heat and allow to cool slightly.

4 In a large mixing bowl, using a hand-held electric whisk, beat together the vegan spread and sugar until pale and fluffy.

5 Whisk in the chocolate mixture and flax ‘eggs’, and beat until well combined. Then, using a metal spoon, stir in the flour and one teaspoon of salt.

6 Pour into the prepared tin, sprinkle with a little extra salt if you like, and bake for 20 minutes until just set – the centre will still be slightly gooey. Cool in the tin for 10 minutes, then transfer to a cooling rack. When completely cold, remove the baking paper and cut into squares.

Extracted from VeganEasy by Denise Smart (Ebury Press, £15)
Photography by William Shaw
How we dress can be key to our identity – it’s part of how we choose to present ourselves to the outside world. Clothes can make us feel good, boost our confidence and improve our mood. But when you are faced with a daily struggle to get dressed, you can be left feeling frustrated, angry and isolated.

Katie Ellis is the founder of accessible clothing company The Able Label. She says that enabling people to dress themselves allows them to stay independent, and also helps to build confidence. “Customers have said to us that they don’t go out any more because they worry that when it comes to leaving, they won’t be able to put their coat back on. Something like that shouldn’t be holding people back, so we offer alternatives to help them,” she explains. “It is also about keeping your identity and personality. When you put your favourite outfit on, it lifts you and affects your whole psyche.”

By replacing buttons with touch closures, such as Velcro, and changing designs to be front-opening, clothes become accessible again. The Able Label has sourced a robust Velcro to ensure that fastenings are strong and last as long as the garment. The company also uses fabrics such as jersey, viscose and elastane, which are stretchy and prevent the wearer having to squeeze into them.

It takes just a few simple adaptations to wardrobe essentials to make them accessible to all, but they can transform lives. “A lot of our customers tell us that dressing used to be a nightmare and they ended up sitting in their nightie all day,” explains Jemma Dunn, managing director at Adaptawear. “Now, they are able get on with their lives.”

**Getting closure**

Pulling on a top over your head can be impossible, especially if you have
It’s a wrap!
Dresses and skirts in front-opening and wraparound styles are a lot easier to put on. They’re safer, too, because you don’t have to bend down to take them on and off. Again, go for Velcro or magnetic fastenings, rather than buttons or zips.

You wear the trousers
For women, leggings are more manageable than tights, and give much-needed warmth in springtime when paired with long tops or dresses. If jeans are uncomfortable for you, then jeggings are a great option. For men, elasticated-waist trousers are easier to put on than trousers with tricky zips and buttons.

Marks & Spencer has several options available, including chinos for men and cotton-rich joggers for women, both of which look smart, but are soft and easy to move around in.

Adaptawear’s men’s cords are great for spring, while the cotton trousers help keep you cool when the temperature starts to rise. There’s also a style of trouser that opens on both sides past the hips to make it easier to take them on and off.

Brilliant bras
Bras are one of the trickiest items to deal with. Front-opening styles are easier and are sold by many high street retailers. Adaptawear stocks bras with popper fastenings or large flat hooks, while The Able Label also offers a version with Velcro closures.

Over the top
If you have restricted shoulder mobility, putting on a coat can be a real struggle. Capes and ponchos offer a good alternative because they do not have tricky armholes – check out Adaptawear’s fleecy cape, £15. If you are looking for a coat, choose one with a slippery lining so it’s easier to pull on and slide off, such as The Able Label’s Marilyn Wool Blend Coat, £130.

From head to toe
Accessories are great for dressing up an outfit, and helping you feel special. The Able Label offers jewellery with magnetic clasps that are less fiddly than traditional clasps to fasten, while Adaptawear has a range of accessories for men, such as clip-on ties and belts.

If you have a problem finding shoes, check out Cosyfeet’s range of stylish spring footwear, which offers extra support for people with swollen or painful feet.

Young lives
Marks & Spencer has a new Adapted Easy Dressing range designed especially for children aged up to 16. Developed alongside parents and paediatricians, the clothes are made from the softest materials, with hidden care labels and easy fastenings.

You may be able to claim VAT exemption (a 20 per cent discount) on clothing and footwear if it has been designed for use by a person with a long-term health condition, such as arthritis. All you need to do is sign a declaration at the point of purchase, saying the item is going to be used by a person with arthritis. The Able Label, Cosy Feet and Adaptawear have more information on their websites. You can also find out more at gov.uk/financial-help-disabled/vat-relief or call 0300 200 3700.

Tips for dressing
• Dress in a seated position, as this improves your balance, and, if possible, in front of a mirror
• Use dressing aids to help, such as long-handle shoe horns and reacher sticks
• Lay items out before dressing into them. For example, lay a coat open in a chair, sit down in the chair and dress into it. The chair will help to keep the coat open.

Useful contacts
theablelabel.com 01622 744242
marksandspencer.com 0333 014 8000
adaptawear.com 0800 051 1931
cosyfeet.com 01458 447275
springchicken.co.uk 01865 339366

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