



Improving Patient Outcomes: *Managing Osteoarthritis Symptoms with Physiotherapy*

When your patients present in your clinic and tell you that their arthritis is “playing up”, don’t forget that physiotherapy is one of the best drug-free methods not only in managing arthritic conditions but is also a great preventative measure in minimising long-term damage and the need for medication. This provides your patient with the freedom to continue their daily activities with significantly less pain.

The areas in the body that are most commonly affected by osteoarthritis are the spine, hips and knees. Patients will typically first complain of “being stiff.” As their condition worsens, this will lead to a limitation in their day-to-day activities.

Most arthritic symptoms develop due to a combination of articular cartilage wear and rising levels of joint hypomobility (stiffness). These issues gradually lead to worsening movement mechanics resulting in inflammation that develops in and around the joint. Whilst the underlying articular cartilage wear cannot be reversed, physiotherapy can restore flexibility and strength to the arthritic joint, thereby helping to relieve inflammation and improve function. Manual therapy techniques, specific strengthening exercises and generalised flexibility programmes all aid in decreasing joint hypomobility, in turn reducing inflammation and significantly improving your patients pain.

If patients are referred to physiotherapy early, we can make a difference and minimise the likelihood of severe degeneration and long-term problems.

Postural Dysfunction and Spinal Pain

Most postures can be sustained for short periods of time, however certain sitting and standing postures are detrimental to patient health. These postures place increased pressure on spinal structures such as joints, ligaments, nerves, capsules, and muscles. In most instances, these postures are a result of the tasks a patient is performing.

For most people, daily work duties might include sustained sitting at a computer or prolonged periods of working with a poor ergonomic setup at their workstation. For retirees, these tasks might include prolonged bending while gardening, working bent over a table or performing a hobby that involves a lot of sitting.

Prolonged periods in these postures cause adaptive shortening of the soft tissues, which develops into musculoskeletal dysfunction and discomfort.

Physiotherapy Intervention

Changes in the soft tissues around the spine (including muscles, ligaments, and joint capsules) that result from prolonged static postures will lead to changes in pressure distribution over the joint surfaces of the spine. This will eventuate in joint degeneration and osteoarthritis. Prolonged poor positioning also results in the weakening of postural muscles making it increasingly difficult for patients to maintain good posture.

Our physiotherapy program is tailored to effectively address these changes in the tissues and improve patients’ quality of life.



Treatment Protocol

Phase 1 - We conduct a thorough subjective and objective review of the patient's symptoms and postural assessment. This includes:

- Detailed postural observation – via posture screen software
- Testing the passive accessory movement of the facet and intervertebral joints which is integral to overall spinal ROM
- Evaluation of muscle length, strength, and muscle control testing
- Evaluation of functional tasks

Phase 2 - We address movement dysfunction using a variety of spinal manual therapy techniques. These include:

- Passive accessory techniques to restore movement to facet and intervertebral joints
- McKenzie extension techniques
- Passive accessory joint mobilisation techniques
- “Mulligan’s with Movement” mobilisations
- Soft tissue releases and mobility exercises

Phase 3 - As movement is improved and pain decreases, muscle strength, function, and coordination are addressed. In “de-stressing” the joints, we settle the irritation, allowing patients to perform daily activities without pain. Typical techniques used in this phase are:

- Clinical Pilates
- Functional strengthening exercises
- Co-ordination exercises

Summary

At Benchmark Physiotherapy, our treatment philosophy is to Remove, Restore and Redefine. Working with our expert team of physiotherapists in the management of osteoarthritis or postural pain, your patient's symptoms can be effectively treated ensuring they return to their full functional capacity and reduce long-term problems.

Contact us to find out more about
how we can help your patients
reach their potential.

Call
1300 381 207

References

1. Waongenngarm P, van der Beek AJ, Akkarakittichoke N, Janwantanakul P. Effects of an active break and postural shift intervention on preventing neck and low-back pain among high-risk office workers: a 3-arm cluster-randomized controlled trial. *Scand J Work Environ Health*. 2021 May 1;47(4):306-317. doi: 10.5271/sjweh.3949. Epub 2021 Apr 27. PMID: 33906239; PMCID: PMC8091075.
2. Hayden JA, Ellis J, Ogilvie R, Malmivaara A, van Tulder MW. Exercise therapy for chronic low back pain. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2021, Issue 9. Art. No.: CD009790. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD009790.pub2.
3. Coulter ID, Crawford C, Hurwitz EL, Vernon H, Khorsan R, Suttorp Booth M, Herman PM. Manipulation and mobilization for treating chronic low back pain: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Spine J*. 2018;18(5):866–879. doi: 10.1016/j.spinee.2018.01.013.
4. Byrnes K, Wu PJ, Whillier S. Is Pilates an effective rehabilitation tool? A systematic review. *J Bodyw Mov Ther*. 2018;22(1):192–202. doi: 10.1016/j.jbmt.2017.04.008.