



# Exercise and Movement

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# Exercise and Movement

## Why are exercise and movement important?

Exercise is the single most important thing that you can do to manage your disease and it is a recommended treatment. A life-long commitment to regular physical exercise is vital to manage the disease well.

Exercise has many benefits, including:

- allowing you to maintain flexibility and range of motion
- increasing bone and muscle strength
- maintaining or improving your posture
- reducing stiffness and pain
- improving sleep and energy
- improving mood generally
- reducing depression and anxiety.

**One of the main benefits of regular exercise is that it may help to slow disease progression and even prevent future disability.**

Many people find they can't perform at the same level they did previously – try not to be discouraged. **Give yourself time to adapt to your condition**, listen to your body and find an activity or sport that you can do – and that you enjoy doing.

Exercise has several elements, all of which are important. Stretching and reaching exercises help to maintain posture, flexibility and range of motion. Exercises to build strength and stamina can improve balance, lung capacity and cardiovascular health.

## What exercise is appropriate

**Any physical activity is better than no activity**, and everyone is capable of some regular exercise, even if it is gentle. If your mobility is limited, you can still do a seated range of motion exercises. Even clapping your hands and moving your feet up and down while seated is better than just sitting.

Your physical activity should be discussed with healthcare providers, who will assess you and your capabilities. A physiotherapist can show you suitable exercises.

If you are exercising regularly without pain, there is probably no reason to stop – unless advised by a healthcare professional. It is most beneficial to do a variety of exercise types, including aerobic, stretching, balance and coordination, and strength.

## How to start exercising

The key to exercising is to start, and continue to build up, slowly. Begin with the exercises in this brochure and build up from there. Any new exercise may cause some mild discomfort or aching in the following days, but don't let that put you off.

It is easy, especially if you used to be fit and exercise regularly, to start too intensely. You could feel too much discomfort afterwards and it may discourage you from continuing. So, take it slowly and gently to begin with, increasing the intensity over time.

## Motivation to exercise

Being stiff and sore can make it difficult to start exercising. But remember that any activity is better than no activity and that for many people, exercising in a group is better than exercising alone.

Directed group exercise can provide the motivation to build a healthy, life-long exercise habit. Other motivations are to pick a form of exercise that you enjoy, to try different things from time to time and to set goals for yourself.

## When to use caution

You should consult with your doctor or healthcare provider before starting any exercise program. Don't exercise strenuously if you are ill or injured; if your doctor advises against it; or if it hurts, causes you pain or imbalance. Exercise can help alleviate flares, but be cautious and don't overdo things if you are in a flare.

## Specific axSpA exercises

There are exercises, which are particularly helpful for axSpA patients. These are illustrated below and each one has specific benefits in terms of posture, range of motion and flexibility. You should try to do all these exercises, or a rotating selection of them, as part of your regular exercise routine.

Videos showing how to do these, and links to other suitable exercises, can be found at [www.asif.info/resources](http://www.asif.info/resources)

### Posture stretch while standing



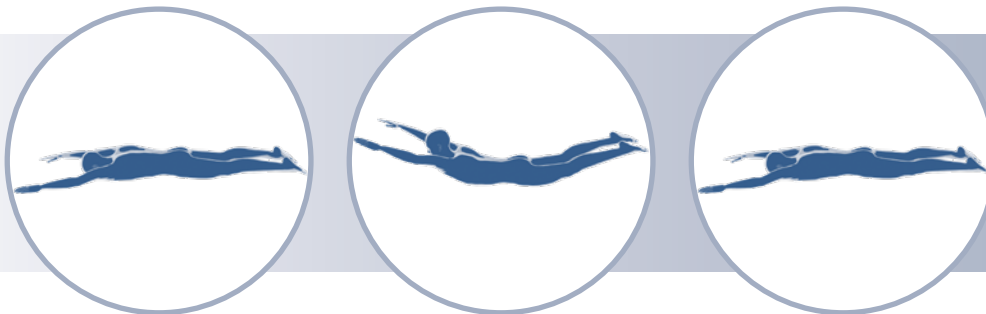
### Trunk side stretch



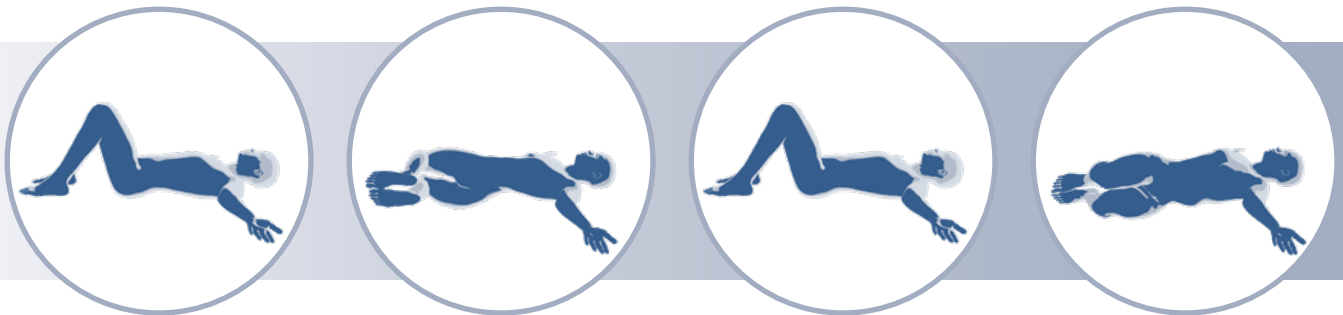
## Cat stretch



## Superman stretch



## Back and hip rotation



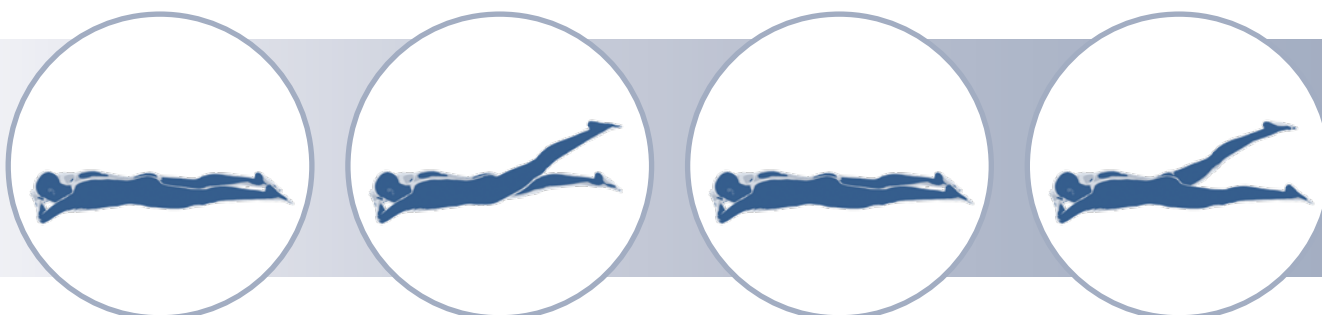
## Back rotation



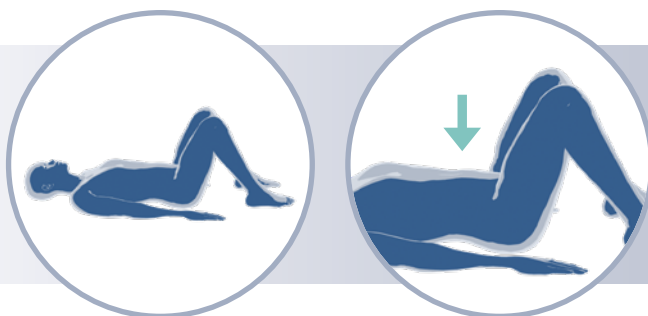
## Hamstring stretch



## Hip flexor stretch



## Pelvic tilt



Unless your doctor has advised you not to do a particular activity,  
**you can participate in any sport.**  
It is helpful to choose a sport that motivates and interests you.



## Other exercises and movement

AxSpA patients have experienced particular benefits from the following activities:

### Walking

Walking is an excellent form of exercise with many benefits. It is easy to do, costs nothing, improves fitness and balance and is known to reduce pain, stiffness and improve mood. As with any form of exercise, start slowly and go at your own pace.

Join the **Walk Your AS Off** challenge, held in May every year, and raise awareness about axSpA while you walk – find out more at [asif.info/worldasday](https://asif.info/worldasday).

### Swimming and Hydrotherapy

Swimming is an ideal and popular form of exercise for many people living with axSpA. It allows gentle use of all the muscles and improves lung capacity and general fitness. If your neck is too stiff to turn it, try using a snorkel.

Hydrotherapy is doing exercises (other than swimming) in water. It is beneficial because the buoyancy of water makes exercising less painful and less effort. Both swimming and hydrotherapy will be easier and more relaxing in a heated pool. Hydrotherapy pools are usually much warmer than swimming pools.

## Yoga

Many people enjoy yoga for its spiritual and physical aspects that include focus on breathing, stretching, posture, meditation and awareness. Yoga can help with spinal flexibility, range of motion and mobility. Its ability to ease pain and lower stress are also benefits. Mastering the full range of yoga poses correctly takes a long time. However, there are many basic poses that are easier to do and are still beneficial. There can be risks in doing poses incorrectly, so find a good teacher if you want to start practising yoga.

## Pilates

Pilates is another form of exercise that is popular. Pilates consists of specific exercises done in a specific order to strengthen and stabilise your core. Pilates can result in stronger muscles and increased flexibility. You may also have better posture and an improved sense of well-being.

## Tai Chi

Tai Chi differs from other types of exercise in several respects. The movements are usually circular and never forced, the muscles are relaxed rather than tensed, the joints are not fully extended or bent, and connective tissues are not stretched. Tai Chi can be easily adapted for anyone, making it a good form of exercise for patients with axSpA. Tai Chi is good for muscle strength, flexibility and balance.

## Cycling

Going for a bike ride is good for your heart and muscles, and it may improve how you walk, climb stairs and your balance. Make sure that you adjust the saddle and handlebar correctly for your height and that you sit up more than lean forward. Invest in a wide saddle that relieves pressure on the perineum. Try to avoid cycling on bumpy surfaces; or use a bicycle that has shock absorbers or fat tyres.

## Weight training

Weight training can help you tone your muscles and fight age-related muscle loss. It can also help to reduce the risks of heart disease and improve heart health. Weight training can assist with better sleep, improved metabolism and mood.



## Cautions and Disclaimers

This material is for information and education purposes only. It is not medical advice and does not replace consulting with a doctor or healthcare professional.

ASIF is not liable for risks or issues associated with the information in this guide.



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