

# Working with arthritis



devised with and for people with arthritis



ARTHRITIS CARE

*Empowering  
people with arthritis.*

Arthritis will affect everyone's day-to-day life in a different way. Finding and retaining a job is one area of your life that might be challenging. But there are plenty of reasons why you should try to stay in work.

This booklet is for anyone with arthritis who is either starting work for the first time, trying to stay in employment or returning to work. There are many services available to help you stay in employment and plenty of things to do if you find you can't.

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## WORK AND ARTHRITIS

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Working with arthritis is not always easy. People with arthritis sometimes face discrimination in the job market or the workplace. This can involve being overlooked in the recruitment selection process, problems with getting to work or with managing while at work.

However, there is a lot of support available to help you find and retain work – and more legal protection than ever before. Working part-time or full-time will often mean that you are better off financially and many people with arthritis also find that working makes them feel better. Support is also available if you are unable to work.

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***“It’s good to recognise you can’t do what you used to be able to do, but that you can do something else”***

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Employers are also starting to recognise that there are many advantages to employing disabled people, including:

- 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 the organisation will be viewed as more inclusive
- the adjustments made to help in 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.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) means that employers cannot discriminate against a disabled person in terms of recruitment or the provision of appropriate facilities to enable you to carry out your job. It is unlawful for any 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 DDA. The DDA says a disabled person is someone with 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'.

This would include someone with a significant mobility difficulty (such as problems using public transport or going down steps) as a result of arthritis. 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 DDA's definition of disability, your arthritis must have a serious effect on your daily activities expected to last for at least 12 months.

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) in England, Wales and Scotland, and the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland can help people work out whether they meet the legal definition of 'disabled'. They can also advise you on your rights as a disabled person (see page 27).

# FINDING AND APPLYING FOR WORK

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## ■ Thinking about work

Everybody has different skills they can bring to an employer. When finding work to suit you, weigh up the positives and negatives of different working environments.

There might be jobs you cannot do because you do not have the right skills, or because your condition would make it difficult. Consider your reasons for stopping work in the first place if you have worked before. 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.

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***“I’ve found there’s a very delicate balance between how much I can do and pushing it too far”***

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Consider what kind of role you want and the skills and experience you can offer. Don’t forget to think about skills

developed outside work, for example, as a parent or carer, or on a work placement.

Remember the skills you have because of your arthritis – such as patience, negotiation, planning and problem-solving – are actually strengths. For example, you may have developed skills in thinking of 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.

## ■ Finding work

Government help varies across the UK. The following services are available across the UK unless otherwise specified.

A good place to start is your local Jobcentre or Jobcentre Plus. These are official government agencies offering advice and support for work. In Jobcentre Plus offices, as well as employment advice, you can also get information on benefits.

If you are considered disabled according to the DDA’s definition then you will be



referred to a disability employment adviser (DEA) who is part of the disability services team based at Jobcentres.

In Northern Ireland, help is available at JobCentres/Jobs and Benefits Offices. The disablement advisory service there provides specialist help to disabled people and their employers. Special needs careers officers provide support for young disabled people looking for training or work.

Other places where you can look for work include:

- local, national or trade newspapers
  - online recruitment websites
  - recruitment agencies
  - directly through large employers, for example, the NHS, councils and voluntary organisations produce job vacancy lists on a regular basis.
- Most local libraries provide free access to computers and the internet. If you know the kind of place you would like to work it can be worth sending a company your CV on the off-chance they have a suitable opening.

## Positive about Disability



When you are applying for jobs, look out for employers who have joined the

Positive about Disability scheme (also known as the Two Ticks disability symbol). This shows the employer is positive about recruiting disabled people. Employers who use the symbol have made these five commitments:

- to interview all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and to consider them on their abilities
- to discuss, at least once a year, with disabled employees, what both parties can do to make sure disabled employees can develop and use their abilities
- to make every effort when employees become disabled to make sure they stay in employment
- to take action to ensure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness
- each year to review the five

commitments and what has been achieved, and plan ways to improve on them.

This scheme does not operate in Northern Ireland.

## Schemes available for disabled job seekers

There are a number of government schemes available to help disabled job seekers into work. Contact your Jobcentre or equivalent to make an appointment to see a DEA to apply for the schemes below.

### New Deal for Disabled People –

The New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) is a voluntary programme for people who are claiming a benefit relating to their disability or health condition (incapacity benefits). NDDP offers support from a network of employment specialists who can:

- advise you on finding work, including help with applications and interviews
- help to match your skills and abilities to what employers need, and identify your training needs
- support you when you start working.

To find out more about NDDP in England, Scotland or Wales, phone the NDDP helpline on 0800 137 177. In Northern Ireland, contact a disablement employment adviser at your local JobCentre/Jobs and Benefits Office.

**Workstep** – Workstep provides job support to more severely disabled people who need help to get or keep a job. The scheme offers a variety of job opportunities with a wide range of organisations from small high street shops to national companies. Ask a DEA if you are eligible for Workstep and whether it would be the right choice for you. Workable in Northern Ireland provides a range of support.

**Job Introduction Scheme** – The Job Introduction Scheme allows you to try out a job when you or the employer are not entirely sure whether it would be suitable. The scheme pays a fixed sum a week to your employer during your initial period of employment – usually six weeks, although in some circumstances, this

can be extended to 13 weeks. Your employment must be expected to last at least six months after the payments have stopped.

**Work Preparation** – The Work Preparation programme can help if you have been out of work for a long time due to arthritis. It does this by tackling employment-related needs that result from your disability and prevent you from getting a job or taking up training.

Work Preparation can increase your job prospects by improving your job-finding skills and techniques, and when necessary, it provides work experience. You may stay on your existing benefits or be able to claim others.

In Northern Ireland JobCentres also offer employment assessments. These can help you formulate a plan to obtain or retain suitable employment.

## ■ **Ways of working**

You may decide that full-time work is not suitable for you because of the way your arthritis impacts on your life.

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**“It’s frustrating not being able to work full-time, but it’s better than not being able to work at all”**

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There are other options you could consider. These include:

- part-time work (you may still be able to receive benefits, see ‘Benefits’ for more information)
- flexible working – this might mean starting earlier or later in the day or being able to work from home
- job-sharing – sharing a full-time job with another person. Some jobs are advertised as job shares or you can suggest the idea to your employer
- self-employment. Working for yourself will mean more flexibility in how you work, but also increased responsibility (for example, paying your own income tax).

If you decide to start your own business you can still benefit from government programmes such as the New Deal scheme and Access to Work (see page 15). A Jobcentre adviser (JobCentre/Jobs and Benefits

Office in Northern Ireland) can give you more information.

The Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) in England and Wales, Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) in Scotland and disablement employment advisors at local JobCentres in Northern Ireland offer a wide range of information, advice and training to help meet the needs of small businesses. Some may also offer financial help with staff development costs.

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**“Flexible working means I can travel whenever I want, like out of rush hour”**

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Business Link (England), Business Gateway (Scotland), Business Eye (Wales) and Invest Northern Ireland provide information and advice about setting up your own business.

## ■ Applying for work

When applying for work, make sure that you take care with job applications. Bear in mind:

- if an application form is provided, don’t send a CV
- write or type neatly and try not to make mistakes
- provide as much detail about

your work, training and educational history as you can

- make sure you address each point on the person specification (or job description), giving examples of how you meet the criteria
- always keep a copy of your finished application.

### **Should I tell a potential/current employer about my arthritis?**

This is a cause for concern for many applicants who have arthritis. Under the DDA it is

unlawful for employers to discriminate against disabled people in their recruitment and selection procedures. Although not all people with arthritis will meet the DDA definition of disability, 72 per cent do.

While employers are allowed to ask questions about health and disability on an application form or to issue a separate health questionnaire, they should not use the responses in a discriminatory manner. 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. Signing a declaration saying you are not disabled when in fact you are may have adverse repercussions at a later date.

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**📌 Sometimes, it's better to try to work at home 📌**

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

Remember that you can only be guaranteed protection by equal opportunities policies and the DDA 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.

If you are asked directly whether you have a health condition or disability on the application form or at interview you should answer it. Employers will want to know how your condition would affect how you

work, so you should answer the question in a positive way, stressing your abilities and why you are right for the job. Naturally, you should state that your arthritis has no practical effect if this is the case.

Some people will find it helpful to talk things through in order to make this decision. Families and friends can help or you can contact Arthritis Care's helpline (see the back page).

### **Sickness records**

If you are asked on the application form about how many days you have taken off sick in the past year, you should clearly separate any leave you have taken in connection with your arthritis. Some employers are prepared to disregard disability-related sickness when assessing sickness records.

### **■ Employers' recruitment responsibilities**

In the recruiting process, although these suggestions are good practice, they are not adopted by all employers.

- Health/disability questions on

application forms should be accompanied by positive statements about the employer's policy towards disabled applicants.

- Questions asking if disabled jobseekers require any particular arrangements to attend an interview or do the job should be included.
- Employers should ensure wording and language does not give the impression questions will be used to exclude disabled jobseekers.
- Questions at interview about disability/health should be used only if they are relevant to the job advertised.

### **Reasonable adjustments**

Another advantage of being open about your condition 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 so

that you do not have to spend too long sitting down or standing up.

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

## MANAGING AT WORK

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Whether you have arthritis when you start work or develop it while at work, it is important to know what can help you to keep your job, gain promotion or help you to take on a new role.

Combining arthritis with work is sometimes not that easy. The day-to-day stresses and strains of our working lives can take their toll on anyone's health. Worries about taking time off and whether your boss really understands your arthritis can all add to the pressure.

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**“My arthritis has made me into a better worker as I have to think about how to do things”**

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Getting to work can also be a real struggle, especially if you have to use overcrowded buses and trains, or travel long distances. As a result, you may feel even more tired than usual. Having to use equipment that is not adapted to suit your needs can drain your energy levels.

However, there is plenty you can do to tackle any problems and there is help available, as

detailed later on. Everyone feels stressed from time to time and this is normal, but learning to manage your stress is important.

You might be worried about taking a little longer to complete a task than others but try being honest about your abilities to your manager. Bottling up your emotions and worrying will make you feel more stressed.

Remember to take time out to relax and unwind at the end of the working day. Try to make time for some sort of exercise regime to beat stress and maintain mobility. You should also try to make sure you take regular breaks during the day and stay mobile.

See Arthritis Care's booklet on exercise and arthritis for more information about how to stay active.

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**“I find meetings hard sometimes. I need to get up and walk about”**

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If you are having difficulty in your job, in terms of the time it takes to complete tasks, or are feeling

generally stressed or tired, you may benefit from some advice or extra support at work.

It is better to seek help sooner rather than later as often just making a simple adjustment will help you do your job better and more comfortably. Your employer is required to make 'reasonable adjustments' to enable you to carry out your job (see below).

The DRC publishes a series of employment fact sheets on topics such as reasonable adjustments, sick pay and your rights under the DDA.

## ■ Reasonable adjustments

According to the DDA, employers have a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to employment practice and premises if these place you at a substantial disadvantage.

Whether an adjustment is considered reasonable or not is assessed according to its practicality and potential effectiveness, as well as the cost and extent of any disruption as a result of the change.

The adjustments employers might be required to consider include allowing you to:

- have reasonable time off for rehabilitation, assessment or treatment
- rearrange your work hours to avoid the rush hour. It may even be possible for you to work from home occasionally, or part-time
- move your workspace to the ground floor or improve access to your current working area
- reallocate duties that you find difficult to perform because of your arthritis
- obtain special equipment to help you work better, for example, an adapted chair, wrist rests, or voice-activated software.

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***“I used to push myself until I collapsed, which I don't do any more”***

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Remember it is in your employer's interests to consider these changes as these should minimise the time you take off related to your condition. There are also organisations and schemes to help employers meet the costs involved in making reasonable adjustments.

## Maintaining a good posture

All employers are legally required to protect the health and safety of their employees. This includes ensuring the safety and suitability of work equipment for the purpose for which it is provided.

If you are office-based you can ask for a 'workstation assessment' during which you will be advised on how to minimise discomfort at your workstation, and if necessary, provided with special equipment (like a more supportive chair).

Maintaining a 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 a good posture:

- keep your back aligned against the back of your chair and your shoulders straight – avoid slouching
- vary how you sit so that you are not in the same position for long periods of time, and take regular breaks away from the screen
- your knees should be even with your hips or slightly higher whilst seated and your



- feet should be flat on the floor
- make sure your forearms are horizontal when you are sitting at your desk
- try not to overstretch your fingers by keeping your wrists straight when typing
- your eyes should be the same height as the top of your computer screen.

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**“Doing all my work hunched over a desk gave me incredible neck pain”**

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## Getting the right equipment

The use of appropriate equipment and technology can make a big difference to working life. There have been enormous developments in this field in recent years and most of the devices you may need probably already exist. Your nearest Disabled Living Centre (DLC) – run by Assist UK – will tell you about them or ring the Disabled Living Foundation (DLF) Helpline.

Where commercial aids are not available you can go to Remap – an organisation that provides customised technical equipment for disabled people. You may then be referred to a

local Remap group. These are voluntary local groups of engineers and other specialists who can devise customised solutions for you.

If you develop a disability while in work, your local disability services team (contactable through your Jobcentre or equivalent) can assess your needs and provide the equipment subject to an employer contribution. They may refer you to an Access to Work adviser. Refusal to contribute by the employer may constitute discrimination under the DDA.

All of the help above is available across the UK.

## Occupational health services

Although employers are not legally required to provide occupational health services (OHS), many do recognise the benefits of ensuring the good health of their employees. These include ensuring that employees recover quickly if unwell and minimising absence from work.

OHS consists of occupational health practitioners including physicians, psychologists and experts on the design of user-friendly equipment. They can evaluate reasons for absence, conduct health assessments, assist in planning returns to work and promoting good health. Services can be provided in-house or externally depending on the size of the organisation.

## Access to Work

The Access to Work scheme identifies what a person needs to be able to do their job effectively, and operates across the whole of the UK. Access to Work provides practical advice and support to disabled people and their employers to help overcome work-related obstacles. This may be in the form of grants towards:

- special aids or equipment
- adaptations to premises
- help with travel to work if you are unable to use public transport
- support workers.

You may be eligible if you are unemployed, employed or self-employed, and are disabled as defined by the DDA. Access to Work is available whether you start a new job or whether you develop a disability whilst you are at work.

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### *“The benefits I get from Access to Work have kept me in work”*

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Contact your local Jobcentre or equivalent and talk to an Access to Work adviser or a disability employment adviser (DEA) for advice and an application form.

## ■ Telling your colleagues you have arthritis

Whether or not to tell your colleagues about your arthritis can be a tough decision, especially if you are in a new job. Arthritis is often invisible and colleagues may have little understanding of it.

Try to slowly work up to these discussions with your employer and colleagues by talking first to friends and family about your condition. You could offer your colleagues Arthritis Care literature to read. See 'Should I tell a potential/current employer about my arthritis?' on page 8.

The best policy is to be positive and honest about how your condition affects you, and about your needs. You might face more difficulties if you hide the fact that you have arthritis, including making your arthritis worse, which could result in you needing more time off.

You may also want to ask your doctor to write a letter of explanation – this should stress the positive side of your arthritis and your abilities.

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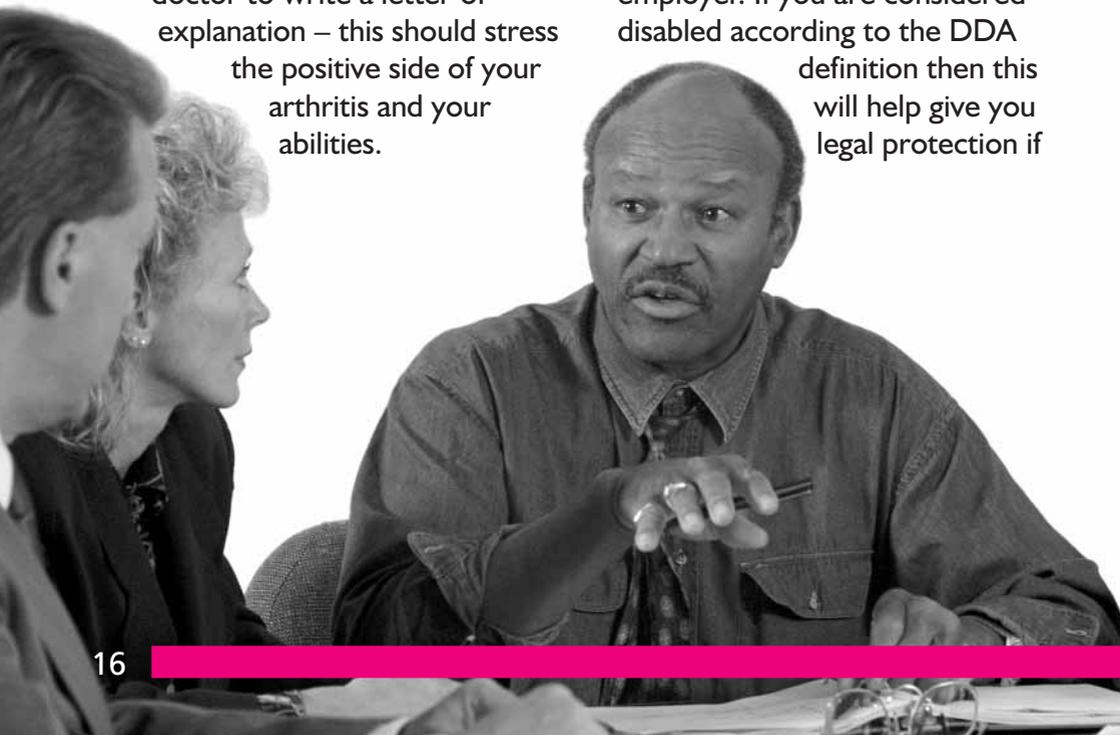
**“Be honest with your colleagues and they’ll respect and help you”**

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### ■ Dealing with discrimination

If you are worried about approaching your employer to ask for help or if they seem reluctant to make adjustments to improve your working life, a DEA at your local Jobcentre or equivalent may be able to advise you on how to bring up the subject. You can also contact the Arthritis Care helpline.

You may feel that you are being treated unfairly by an employer. If you are considered disabled according to the DDA definition then this will help give you legal protection if



you feel that you are being discriminated against.

Under the DDA, discrimination occurs where:

- a disabled person is treated less favourably than someone else because of their disability
- there is a failure to make a reasonable adjustment for a disabled person.

It may help you, if you pursue the case, to keep a log of the incidents you think demonstrate this. If a dispute arises that must be heard in court, you must demonstrate that your arthritis has a serious effect on your daily activities and this must last, or be expected to last, for at least 12 months.

This can be more of a problem for people with less severe arthritis. Victimisation or harassment by your colleagues or employer is also unlawful according to the DDA definition.

If you belong to a trade union they should take up any issues with your employer on your behalf and provide legal representation if necessary.

For more information on your rights you should refer to the following publications available from the DRC (see page 27):

- *How do I make a claim? A guide to taking a DDA employment case to a tribunal (EMP3).*
- *Who has rights under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995? (EMP6)*

The DRC (and the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland) will be able to advise and help people who have experienced discrimination.

Contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau (visit [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) or look in the Yellow Pages for your nearest office) for free advice on the DDA. You can obtain free legal advice from the Disability Law Service (see page 28).

## BENEFITS

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You will need to consider your financial situation carefully when entering employment. If you were previously receiving benefits, starting work may mean giving some up, although financial support may still be available as you settle into work.

Some people with arthritis may find they are no longer able to work and will be eligible for different benefits. This section outlines the financial support available depending on your employment status. For further information, go to your local Jobcentre or equivalent.

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**“I found the Benefits Enquiry Line very helpful, before I called I didn’t realise I could be eligible for some benefits”**

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### ■ If you are not working

#### Jobseeker’s Allowance

Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) is for people who are unemployed and actively seeking work. People working fewer than 16 hours a week are also eligible. You claim



JSA by signing on at your local Jobcentre or equivalent.

#### Incapacity Benefit

Incapacity Benefit (IB) is a set

rate of benefit that gives people of working age a replacement income when they cannot work because of ill health or disability, which does not take account of particular financial needs. You may be entitled to IB if you are ill, unable to work and if any of the following apply:

- your employer cannot pay you Statutory Sick Pay, or they stop paying you altogether
- you are self-employed
- you are looking for work.

If you are claiming IB, Severe Disablement Allowance, National Insurance Credits or Income Support because of illness or disability, there is a certain level of 'permitted work' you are allowed to do.

See the Arthritis Care website for up-to-date details.

## **Income Support**

Income Support is a means-tested benefit. It is available to those who are not entitled to IB or find that it – or any other benefits, income or savings – are not enough to live on. This benefit is available to people aged from 16 to 59 years who work less than 16 hours a week.

## **■ If you are disabled and working, but your earnings are low**

### **Benefits**

If you are on a low income and paying Council Tax you can claim Council Tax Benefit.

### **Tax Credits**

Tax Credits are money you receive regularly from the Inland Revenue to help with everyday costs.

To find out more about tax credits, call the Tax Credit Helpline on 0845 300 3900 (0845 603 2000 in Northern Ireland) or visit the HM Revenue and Customs website at [www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits). You may get one or more of the following:

**Child Tax Credit** – Child Tax Credit is a payment to support families with children. You do not need to be working to claim.

**Pension Credit** – Pension Credit can help top up your income so it reaches a minimum level if you are aged 60 or over. Extra amounts may be paid to people who care for others, are severely disabled or have certain housing costs. More information is available from the Pension

Credit application line on 0800 99 1234 or by visiting [www.thepensionservice.gov.uk/pensioncredit](http://www.thepensionservice.gov.uk/pensioncredit)

**Working Tax Credit** – If you are on a low income, aged 16 or over and working 16 hours a week or more, you may be able to get Working Tax Credit. Extra help is available for disabled people. You may also be eligible if you are self-employed or over 50 years old and you are returning to work after being unemployed for a long time.

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**Make sure you are very persistent if you think you may be eligible for a benefit**

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### **Extended payments**

When you start work you may still get certain benefits for four weeks to help you with the move into work. These include Income Support, Incapacity Benefit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax benefit amongst others.

### **Job grant**

This is a one-off payment for the over 25s or lone parents of any age if you start full-time work

after at least 26 weeks on income support, jobseekers allowance or incapacity benefit.

### **If you have extra costs related to a severe disability**

#### **Disability Living Allowance (or Attendance Allowance)**

If you have a disability, whether you are in work or not you might be able to get Disability Living Allowance (or Attendance Allowance if you are aged 65 or over) for extra costs related to your disability.

Disability Living Allowance has two parts – a care component and a mobility component. The care component depends on how much personal care assistance (such as washing and dressing) you need because of your disability. The mobility component depends on the difficulties you have with walking as a result of your disability.

### **Sources of further information**

Guides on benefits for disabled people and those with health conditions are available from your local Jobcentre Plus office or from the Benefit Enquiry Line.



The *Disability Rights Handbook* is a comprehensive guide to benefits and services available for disabled people. It is also useful for families, carers and advisers. It covers all benefits and tells you what they are, who qualifies and how to apply for them. For details on how to order contact Disability Alliance (see page 28).

## HAVING A RETHINK

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### ■ Giving up work

Some people with arthritis will feel that they are unable to continue working because of their condition. Before you come to this decision you should consider whether your employer has made every possible effort to help keep you in employment (see 'Reasonable adjustments' on page 10).

Organisations do not always know about the options available or about schemes such as Access to Work, which will meet many of the costs of making adjustments. It will usually be more cost-effective for your employer to keep you on rather than recruit somebody else.

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### ‘I’m keen to retrain and do something different’

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Disability service teams based in Jobcentres (the disablement advisory service in 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, get in touch with them and see if they can help. It may also help to talk to others if you can – the Arthritis Care helpline may be useful.

If you are no longer able to do your job for health reasons you might be entitled to receive early payment of your pension. All early payment of pension schemes require medical evidence in the form of a certificate or report from a doctor before payments will be made.

Retraining, further education and voluntary work are all options that you can pursue. These activities offer opportunities to develop skills you enjoy and contribute to society – they don't just have to be done with a view to finding work. They often offer more flexibility than paid employment, allowing you to change your hours and take time off, without feeling worried that you may be sacked.

### ■ Training or retraining

To improve your career prospects or to give yourself more options, you may decide

you want to update your skills or learn new ones. Some employers may even support your training.

There are a variety of government training programmes available. Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) in England and Wales and Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) in Scotland provide a range of training and will be able to tell you what is on offer. JobCentres in Northern Ireland will provide information about training through the disablement advisory service.

### **Work-based learning programmes**

If you are unemployed you could try work-based learning. Work-Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) in England and Wales (Training for Work in Scotland) is a voluntary programme available through the Jobcentre and delivered by nationally approved training organisations. It provides work experience and, where relevant, allows you to obtain work-related qualifications.

There is also a wide range of residential courses leading to nationally recognised

qualifications. If you want to become self-employed, you can get advice and support and the chance to test a trade while still receiving benefit.

Generally, to qualify for a training programme you must be 25 years old or over and unemployed continuously for 24 weeks. Disabled people may qualify earlier although access to the programme is at the discretion of the Jobcentre adviser. You also receive a training allowance equivalent to your weekly benefit plus a training premium.

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, designed by the Learning and Skills Council in agreement with the local DEA at the Jobcentre Plus office or Jobcentre.

Across the UK (except Northern Ireland) a place on Work-Based Training for Young People is guaranteed for 16 or 17 year olds, or if you are 18-24

and your arthritis meant that you could not take part earlier.

On a work-based training programme, you may be a trainee or have employed status. Being an employee could give you more legal rights than a trainee, and you will receive wages instead of the basic training allowance. Check with the Benefit Enquiry Line or an adviser at the Jobcentre/ Jobcentre Plus about benefits. In Scotland the youth training programme is called Skillseekers.

### Careers advice

You may feel that you want to talk through your next step with somebody. A disability employment adviser (DEA) at your local Jobcentre or Jobcentre Plus will be able to advise you on your options. Learn Direct provides regional information on courses, careers and funding.

Connexions ([www.connexions-direct.com](http://www.connexions-direct.com)) provides information and advice on careers and work for people in England aged 13 to 19. You can speak to an adviser online or by phone, email or text message.

### Further education

Getting new qualifications is another way to make yourself more attractive to potential employers. Pursuing a subject is good exercise for the brain as well. 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.

Skill (the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities) provides useful advice for disabled people in training and education including offering



photo: Open University

leaflets on access and finance.

**Finding a course** – 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 ([www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)). The Prospects website is a good source of information on courses that are specifically work related ([www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)).

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***‘I would like to get some computer skills because I want to work in an office’***

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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.

Learndirect operates a network of more than 2,000 online learning centres in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They aim to equip people with the skills they

need for employability, particularly those people who have few or no skills or qualifications.

Leonard Cheshire’s Workability project gives disabled people computers and Microsoft software. If you are considered eligible for the programme, you will become a registered college student studying at a virtual college site on the internet. Training in basic information technology applications is delivered online, and leads to nationally accredited qualifications. Call 020 7802 8200 for details.

**Support whilst you are studying/training** – Many universities across the country offer disability services, including university 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 that they are aware of your requirements.

### **Voluntary work**

Voluntary work is one way of enhancing your skills and finding out more about an area that interests you. One good place to start is the do-it website ([www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org)), a UK-wide database of volunteering opportunities. You can search for voluntary projects in your local area based on your skills and interests.

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**“After I got over a bad infection, I took up voluntary work in a care centre”**

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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.

There are many ways of successfully combining arthritis and working life. Plenty of organisations are on hand to

help you into work, manage at work and stay in work – many of these are listed at the back of this booklet.

During your working life, try to focus on what you can do, rather than what you cannot – everyone, whether they have arthritis or not, will find certain tasks difficult.

Employers are increasingly realising the benefits of employing disabled people and the law protects the disabled person. Remember that retraining, or pursuing voluntary work or other activities, are possible options.

## USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

Your local disability service team can be contacted through Jobcentres listed in the telephone directory (or see [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk))

### GENERAL

#### ● **arc (Arthritis Research Campaign)**

Copeman House, St Mary's Court,  
St Mary's Gate, Chesterfield,  
Derbyshire S41 7TD.  
Tel: 01246 558033 or 0870 850 5000  
[www.arc.org.uk](http://www.arc.org.uk)  
Funds medical research into arthritis and produces information.

#### ● **Assist UK (formerly the Disabled Living Centres Council)**

Redbank House, 4 St Chad's Street,  
Cheetham, Manchester M8 8QA.  
Tel: 0870 770 2866  
[www.dlcc.org.uk](http://www.dlcc.org.uk)  
Offers advice about choosing and obtaining equipment for disabled people. Contact to find your nearest Disabled Living Centre.

#### ● **DIALs**

Disability Information and Advice Lines.  
Addresses of local DIALs are in the telephone directory, or available from: DIAL UK, St Catherine's,  
Tickhill Road, Doncaster DN4 8QN.  
Tel: 01302 310123  
[www.dialuk.org.uk](http://www.dialuk.org.uk)

#### ● **Disability Rights Commission**

DRC Helpline,  
FREEPOST MID02164,  
Stratford-upon-Avon  
CV37 9BR.

Tel: 08457 622 633

[www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)

Gives advice and information to disabled people, employers and service providers and supports disabled people in getting their rights under the DDA.

#### ● **Equality Commission**

Equality House,  
7-9 Shaftesbury Square,  
Belfast BT2 7DP.

Tel: 028 90 500600

[www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org)

Promotes equality of opportunity and encourages good practice in Northern Ireland.

#### ● **The Employer's Forum on Disability**

2nd Floor,  
Nutmeg House,  
60 Gainsford Street,  
London SE1 2NY.

Tel: 020 7403 3020

[www.employers-forum.co.uk](http://www.employers-forum.co.uk)

Publishes practical guides to assist employers to train, recruit and develop the skills of disabled employees.

## USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

### EQUIPMENT

#### ● AbilityNet

BT Burne House, Bell Street, North Paddington, London NW1 5BZ.

Tel: 0800 269 545

[www.abilitynet.co.uk](http://www.abilitynet.co.uk)

Advice and support to disabled people on accessing computer technology.

#### ● Disabled Living Foundation

380-384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU.

Tel: 020 7289 6111

Helpline: 0845 130 9177

[www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)

Advice and information on equipment.

#### ● Remap

D9 Chaucer Business Park, Kemsing, Sevenoaks, Kent TN15 6YU.

Tel: 0845 130 0456

[www.remap.org.uk](http://www.remap.org.uk)

Provides specialised equipment for disabled people.

### LEGAL ADVICE

#### ● The Disability Law Service

39-45 Cavell Street, London E1 2BP.

Tel: 020 7791 9800

(Monday-Friday 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm)

[www.dls.org.uk](http://www.dls.org.uk)

Provides free legal advice/representation to disabled people.

### SELF-EMPLOYMENT

#### ● Business Eye (Wales)

Tel: 08457 96 97 98

[www.busesseye.org.uk](http://www.busesseye.org.uk)

#### ● Business Gateway (Scotland)

Tel: 0845 609 6611

[www.bgateway.com](http://www.bgateway.com)

#### ● Business Link (England)

Tel: 0845 600 9006

[www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)

#### ● Invest Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9023 9090

[www.investni.com](http://www.investni.com)

Free impartial business advice and information on starting up a business.

### BENEFITS

#### ● Benefits Enquiry Line for disabled people

Tel: 0800 88 22 00

[www.dwp.gsi.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

In Northern Ireland, the Benefits Enquiry Line is run by the Social Security Agency  
Tel: 0800 220 674

#### ● Disability Alliance

Universal House,  
88-94 Wentworth Street,  
London E1 7SA.

Tel: 020 7247 8776

[www.disabilityalliance.org](http://www.disabilityalliance.org)

Provides information on benefits.

## USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

### CAREERS ADVICE

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#### ● Learn Direct

Tel: 0800 100 900

[www.learndirect.co.uk](http://www.learndirect.co.uk)

Provides information on courses, careers and funding relevant to your area.

### EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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#### ● Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

Head Office,

Chapter House,

18-20 Crucifix Lane,

London SE1 3JW.

Tel: 0800 328 5050 or 020 7450 0620

[www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk)

#### Skill Scotland

Tel: 0131 475 2348

#### Skill Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9028 7000

#### Skill Wales

Tel: 01443 654317

#### ● The Association of National Specialist Colleges

39 Sanders Road, Quorn,

Loughborough,

Leicestershire LE12 8JN.

Tel: 01509 554357

[www.natspec.org.uk](http://www.natspec.org.uk)

Provides advice and guidance on further, higher and continuing education, training and employment for disabled people.

# WORKING WITH ARTHRITIS



**Arthritis Care is the UK's largest organisation working with and for all people who have arthritis.**

Our booklets and magazine, website and professional helpline are tools to enable people to make positive choices. Our network of local groups, self-management programmes and internet forums bring people together to support each other in living life to the full. Our campaigning work promotes civil rights, better access to health and social care provision, and tackles issues important to people in their local area.

## Get in touch with us

- Our helpline offers confidential information and support. Call free on 0808 800 4050 (10am-4pm weekdays) or email [Helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk](mailto:Helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk)
- Our website provides information on all aspects of arthritis and what we are doing in your area. Visit us at [www.arthritiscare.org.uk](http://www.arthritiscare.org.uk)
- Call us to find out more about what we do or how to become a member.

## Arthritis Care contact numbers:

<b>UK Head Office:</b>	<b>020 7380 6500</b>
<b>South England:</b>	<b>020 7380 6509/10</b>
<b>Central England:</b>	<b>0115 952 5522</b>
<b>North England:</b>	<b>01924 882150</b>
<b>Northern Ireland:</b>	<b>028 9448 1380</b>
<b>Scotland:</b>	<b>0141 954 7776</b>
<b>Wales:</b>	<b>01239 711883</b>

