

# Managing Axial Spondyloarthritis (axSpA) Back Pain with Exercise

Exercise plays a key role in managing axial spondyloarthritis (axSpA). By doing light to moderate exercises, you can improve your mobility, posture, muscle strength, balance, and overall health. It also aids in managing pain, fatigue, and stress.<sup>1</sup>

While it's normal to worry about causing damage or worsening pain with exercise, recent studies have shown exercise is highly beneficial for axSpA patients.<sup>1</sup> More active forms of axSpA could benefit from physical activity levels similar to the general population, given the advice of a rheumatologist or physiotherapist.

There are three types of exercise that are critical for axSpA: mobility, strength, and aerobic exercises.<sup>1</sup>

## MOBILITY

Mobility exercises focus on maintaining joint function and flexibility, especially spinal mobility. This usually involves moving your joints to their full range of motion and stretching muscles, tendons, and ligaments around the joint. These exercises are typically performed daily. Some examples are yoga, tai chi and pilates.<sup>2</sup>

## STRENGTH

Strength exercises aim to fortify muscles and bones and improve function and balance. This generally involves working your muscles against a weight or force, like dumbbell weights, resistance bands, or body weight. It's important to consult a physiotherapist for appropriate exercises, especially for those with ankylosis (bone fusion).

## AEROBIC

Aerobic exercises are designed to enhance cardiorespiratory fitness by making your heart and lungs work harder. This is critical for the prevention and management of other illnesses associated with axSpA. Aerobic activities like walking, swimming, or cycling can help achieve these fitness goals.<sup>2</sup>

Each exercise program should be tailored to an individual's specific goals and treatment plans. More importantly, exercise for axSpA patients are best consulted with a physiotherapist.

## SAFETY IN EXERCISING WITH AXSPA

Factors like the physical changes of arthritis, any comorbidities, and the intensity of the arthritis require careful consideration to avoid injury.<sup>2</sup> Some basic pre- and post-exercise practices:

1. Begin your exercise routine with a slow and manageable approach. Gradually increase intensity based on your comfort and endurance.
2. Start your workout sessions with light movements to prep your joints and muscles. Furthermore, consider using heat packs or warm showers to ease any stiffness.

3. Prioritize safety by avoiding exercises that pressure your joints excessively or place them in potentially harmful positions. Whenever feasible, learn and perform exercises under the guidance of a healthcare professional.
4. Conclude your exercises with gentle movements and stretches for a cool-down phase to mitigate muscle pain or stiffness the next day.

**References:**

1. Nuno Pina Gonçalves, et al. The effects of physical exercise on axial spondyloarthritis - a systematic review. ARP Rheumatol. 2023 Aug 27.  
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37728143/>
2. J Millner PT, et al. Exercise for ankylosing spondylitis: An evidence-based consensus statement. Semin Arthritis Rheum, 45 (2016), pp. 411-427.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.semarthrit.2015.08.003>

---

**Source URL:** <https://prod1.novartis.com/ph-en/patient-resources/axial-spondyloarthritis-axspa/managing-axial-spondyloarthritis-axspa-back-pain-exercise>

**List of links present in page**

1. <https://prod1.novartis.com/ph-en/patient-resources/axial-spondyloarthritis-axspa/managing-axial-spondyloarthritis-axspa-back-pain-exercise>
2. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37728143/>
3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.semarthrit.2015.08.003>