

Treating Ankylosing Spondylitis

- Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS) can cause pain, physical disability, and result in medical complications if not adequately treated.
- Treatment depends on severity of symptoms and can vary from person to person. Sometimes the regimen can even change at different times for the same person.
- Your rheumatologist can help determine the best medication for you and also help with lifestyle changes to improve how you feel.



Common medication used to treat AS:

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs)

- Reduce pain and inflammation.
- May be the only therapy needed for some patients.
- Examples include Ibuprofen, Naproxen, Meloxicam, Diclofenac.
- In some people it can be taken as needed, while in others it is required on a regular basis.
- Major side effects: especially if used for long periods, include bleeding from stomach, kidney damage, high blood pressure, and increased risk for heart disease.
- Cox-2 inhibitors: Celecoxib

Biologic therapies

- Newer form of DMARDs which are manufactured using molecular biology techniques. These are often taken as injections or infusions.
- Anti-tumor necrosis factor (TNF) agents: Adalimumab, Etanercept, Certolizumab pegol, Golimumab, Infliximab
- Interleukin-17 (IL-17) inhibitors: Secukinumab, Ixekizumab
- Major side effect: increased risk for infections

Disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)

- These medications are not effective for inflammation of the spine. However, they may be used when hands, feet, or extremities are involved.
- Examples: Sulfasalazine, Methotrexate

Corticosteroids

- Less commonly used in the treatment of AS.
- They may be used in the short term to reduce inflammation in hands, feet, or extremities, or when there is inflammation in the eyes or in the bowels.
- Sometimes steroid injections are used to treat inflammation in the sacroiliac joints.

Non-medical treatment for AS:

Physical Therapy

- Physical therapy is a safe and effective part of treatment for AS.
- Low-impact exercises like swimming can be very helpful.
- Build your core through exercises that support and strengthen your spine.



Diet

- There is no proven diet for AS. However, your diet can have an impact on your symptoms.
- A diet rich in fruit, vegetables, whole grains, olive oil, nuts, seeds, and fish may help reduce inflammation.
- Omega-3 fatty acids in particular can help reduce inflammation.
- Avoid or decrease red meat and full-fat dairy.
- Spices like garlic, turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, and cayenne pepper can help reduce inflammation.

Pain management techniques

- Take your medications as instructed.
- Acupuncture, massage therapy, yoga, and TENS unit (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation).



Lifestyle modification

- Stay physically active and exercise regularly. Balance rest and activity-know your limits.
- Exercises to strengthen the back can increase flexibility and range of motion.
- Learn to maintain a good posture.
- Use heat or cold therapy.
- Ensure you get adequate sleep.
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques to reduce stress in your life.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Stop smoking.

Additional support

- Join a self-management education class.
- Connect with others.
- Ask for help.



Surgery:

Sometimes surgery may be needed. Surgical options need to be considered in the case of a fracture or severe joint damage that affects your ability to move.

You may need to have a joint replaced. Other procedures include removing damaged bone or inserting rods into the spine.