

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.

Contents

Work and arthritis	1
Finding and applying for work	3
Thinking about and finding work. Employers' recruitment responsibilities	
Managing at work	11
What are reasonable adjustments? Telling your colleagues you have arthritis. Dealing with discrimination.	
Benefits	18
Possible benefits if you are working, not working, or if you have extra costs related to a severe disability.	
Having a rethink	22
Giving up work. Training or retraining. Further education.	
Useful organisations	27

Arthritis Care is now a certified member of The Information Standard. This means that you can be confident that Arthritis Care is a reliable and trustworthy source of health and social care information.

All people pictured on the cover and quoted in this booklet have arthritis.

WORK AND ARTHRITIS

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.

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

It's good to recognise you can't do what you used to be able to do, but that you can do something else



- employers who limit their workforce to non-disabled people are restricting their choice of finding the best person for the job.

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.

The Equality Act 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 Equality Act. The Equality Act 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 Equality Act’s definition of disability, your arthritis must have a serious effect on your daily activities expected to last for at least 12 months.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) 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

■ 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.

It will be very useful to think through these questions if you need to adapt your job or look for a new one.

- What things am I good at doing?
- What skills have I developed both in, and outside work?
- What activities cause me discomfort and pain that lasts more than a couple of hours or causes me to lose sleep?
- How can I minimise these sources of discomfort and pain or remove them completely?
- How can I pace myself properly? Tip: if you have a really busy day, plan for a quieter day or two afterwards.
- How can I relax effectively?
- How can I make sure I sleep well?

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.

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, on a work placement, or in your hobbies.

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

I've found there's a very delicate balance between how much I can do and pushing it too far



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, and information on benefits.

If you are considered disabled according to the Equality Act'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. Check www.direct.gov.uk or www.nidirect.gov.uk (in Northern Ireland) for the latest information as changes are planned.

Work Programme – In 2011, the Work Programme will replace the back to work employment support offered by New Deal for Disabled People and Pathways to Work in England, Scotland and Wales. The Work Programme will offer personalised support to people with a variety of needs and target support at the right time.

In Northern Ireland, the Pathways to Work programme offers tailored support to help people into get work.

Work Choice – Workstep, Work Preparation and the Job Introduction Scheme have been replaced by Work Choice, across England, Scotland and Wales.

Work Choice helps disabled people whose support needs cannot be met through other government schemes, including Access to Work. This might be because you need more specialised intensive support to find employment (including self-employment) or to keep a job once you have started work. The support you receive will be tailored to meet your individual needs and will include:

- intensive help to overcome disability related barriers and work related advice to help you find supported or unsupported work – for up to six months
- tailored support to help you stay and develop in work, with a clear focus on helping you to reach a point where you can work without support, wherever possible – for up to two years
- help providing a stable working environment and help in developing your career, where working without support is unlikely to be a realistic option.

In Northern Ireland, the Work Preparation Programme can help you prepare for the return to work. Workable provides a flexible range of long-term support to assist disabled people with substantial barriers to employment, find and keep work. The Job Introduction

Scheme offers you the chance to try out a job when you or the employer are not entirely sure whether or not it would be suitable. It offers employers a weekly grant towards the cost of employing you.

■ 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.

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. Carers are entitled to ask for flexible working
- 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 Access to Work (see page 15). A Jobcentre adviser (JobCentre/Jobs and Benefits Office in Northern Ireland) can give you more information.

Contact the Skills Funding Agency in England, the business skills hotline in Wales, the Scottish Enterprise or your local JobCentre in Northern Ireland. There is a wide range of information, advice, financial help and training to help meet the needs of small businesses.

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

It's frustrating not being able to work full-time, but it's better than not being able to work at all

■ Applying for work

When applying for work, allow plenty of time for job applications. Bear in mind:

- if an application form is provided, don't send a CV
- write or type neatly and ask someone to check it for you
- 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.

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



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

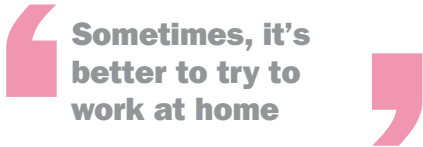
The Equality Act limits the circumstances under which you can be asked health-related questions before you are offered a job. Up to this point, you can only be asked health-related questions to help an employer:

- decide whether they need to make any reasonable adjustments for you to take part in the selection process
- decide whether you can carry out a function that is essential to the job
- monitor diversity among people making applications for jobs
- take positive action to assist disabled people.

Your employer will be allowed to ask health-related questions once you have been offered a job.

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 make things difficult later on.

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.



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

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

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**

The Equality Act limits the circumstances when an employer can ask health-related questions before offering an individual a job. The types of questions that can be asked are listed on page 9.

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 if you would like any adjustments for the interview, you can contact them yourself to request help.

MANAGING AT WORK


There is plenty of help and support available to stay in work or get back into work, if you have arthritis. The following pages show how to adapt and keep your job, take on a new role, get back to work, and what your legal rights are.

It is better to seek help and talk to your employer when you start to experience problems. Be honest about your abilities and your needs. Bottling up your emotions and worrying will only make you feel more stressed. Employers will usually appreciate being told about your arthritis early, rather than finding out later, especially if you have had to take a lot of time off work. Your employer is required to make 'reasonable adjustments' to enable you to carry out your job (see below). It may be that simple adjustments to your workstation or routine will make your job easier and more comfortable.


Think about attending one of Arthritis Care's self-management courses. Challenging Arthritis can help you to manage your arthritis more effectively and learn how to relax and pace yourself appropriately. Challenging Pain can help you to learn easy skills and techniques to manage chronic pain and regain control of your life. Preparing for Work includes specialist job search skills, with content from Challenging Arthritis.

Everyone feels stressed from time to time and this is normal. However, if you are having difficulty in your job, finding it takes longer to complete tasks, or are feeling very stressed or tired, you may benefit from some advice or extra support at work.

If getting to work is a struggle, you might be eligible for help, or to ask to change your hours to avoid the rush hours. (See 'reasonable adjustments' below). You should also try to make sure you take regular breaks during the day and stay mobile. Remember to take time out



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



to relax and unwind at the end of the day. Try to make time for some sort of exercise routine to reduce stress and stay mobile. See Arthritis Care's booklet on exercise and arthritis for more information about how to stay active.

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

■ Reasonable adjustments

According to the Equality Act, employers must make 'reasonable adjustments' to employment practices and premises so these do not place you at a substantial disadvantage. Examples include:

- providing special equipment to help you work better, such as an adapted chair, wrist rests, a mouse and keyboard that support your wrists and hands, or voice-activated software. These can often be fully funded through Access to Work. See page 15.
- allowing you to take short, regular breaks
- rearranging your work hours to avoid the rush hour. It may even be possible for you to work from home occasionally, or part-time
- moving your workspace to the ground floor or making it easier to get to your current working area
- reallocating duties that you find difficult to perform because of your arthritis
- having reasonable time off for treatment, assessment or rehabilitation.

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

It is in your employer's interests to consider these changes, as these should minimise the time you need to take off.

There are also organisations and schemes to help employers meet the costs of making reasonable adjustments.

Maintaining a good posture – All employers are legally required to protect the health and safety of their employees. This includes

providing safe and suitable work equipment.

If you are office-based you can ask for a 'workstation assessment'. You will be advised on how to minimise discomfort at your workstation, and if necessary, provided with special equipment (like a more supportive chair, footrests, a desk of the right height, and a keyboard and mouse to keep your wrists and hands in a correct position).

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 while seated, and your feet should be flat on the floor
- make sure your forearms are horizontal when you are sitting at your desk
- keep your wrists straight when typing and try not to overstretch your fingers
- your eyes should be the same height as the top of your computer screen
- rather than sitting in one position for a long time, try to find a mix of duties which allow you to sit, stand and walk around.



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



Getting the right equipment – The use of appropriate equipment and technology can make a big difference to your working life. Things have developed a lot in recent years, and most of the devices you need may well exist. Your nearest Disabled Living Centre (DLC) – run by Assist UK – will tell you about them. You can also 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 if your employer is willing to contribute to the cost. They may also refer you to an Access to Work adviser.

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. Occupational health advisers help employees to recover

quickly if unwell, with minimal absence from work.


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

Access to Work – Access to Work can provide practical and financial support to help you overcome barriers to starting or keeping a job, where this goes beyond what can be met by reasonable adjustments provided by your employer. Access to Work can also give practical advice to your employer.


Access to Work can help pay for support you may need because of your arthritis, for example:

- aids and equipment in your workplace
- adapting equipment to make it easier for you to use
- money towards any extra travel costs to and from work if you can't use available public transport, or help with adapting your vehicle
- support workers.

You can apply for Access to Work if you have a disability or health condition that has a long-term negative effect on your ability to do your job, you are aged 16 or over, and live in the UK. To be eligible you need to already be doing paid work, or about to start work or become self-employed, or about to begin a work trial arranged through Jobcentre Plus.



The benefits I get from Access to Work have kept me in work



■ Fit note

As of April 2010, the fit note – or statement of fitness for work – replaced the sick note. Your GP will use this form to provide information on how your condition may affect your ability to work, so that you can discuss this with your employer to see if you can return to work. Your GP will choose one of two options to advise

that: you are ‘not fit for work’, or you ‘may be fit for work’.

Your GP will advise that you are fit for work if they think that returning to work – with support from your employer – will help you. They may suggest changes that will help a return to work, such as starting part-time.

■ **Telling your colleagues you have arthritis**

The best approach is to be positive and honest about how your condition affects you, and what your needs are. Try to work up to these discussions with your employer and colleagues by talking first to friends and family about your condition. Arthritis is often invisible and colleagues may have little understanding of it. You could offer your colleagues Arthritis Care’s information to read. See page 9: ‘Should I tell a potential/current employer about my arthritis?’ You may want to ask your doctor to write a letter of explanation – this should stress the positive side of your arthritis and your abilities. You could also suggest your employer and colleagues attend an Arthritis Awareness course (half or full day) run by Arthritis Care.

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



The fact is that hiding the effects of your arthritis might create more difficulties. Your arthritis could become worse, and you may need more time off. Many employers don't know arthritis affects people of working age and are supportive when told about it by an employee, before problems develop.

■ Your rights

Factsheets on topics such as reasonable adjustments, sick pay and your rights under the Equality Act are available from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, see page 27).

According to the Equality Act definition of disability, you are disabled if your arthritis has – or is expected to have – a serious effect on your daily activities for at least 12 months. The definition is broad and many people with arthritis will be covered.

Under the Equality Act, 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
- a disabled person is victimised or harassed by colleagues or an employer.

If you are worried about approaching your employer or if they seem reluctant to make adjustments, a DEA at your local Jobcentre or equivalent may be able to advise you. You can also contact the Arthritis Care helpline.

If you are concerned about the way your employer is treating you, keep a record of particular incidents and correspondence from your employer. For further advice, contact the EHRC (and the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland), or your local Citizens Advice office (visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk or look in the Yellow Pages for your nearest office). If you belong to a trade union they should take up any issues with your employer on your behalf.

BENEFITS

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.

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

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. Changes are being planned to benefits, for the latest information, go to your local Jobcentre or equivalent or visit www.direct.gov.uk (www.nidirect.gov.uk in Northern Ireland).

■ 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.

Employment and Support Allowance – Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is a new, UK-wide benefit to help people manage



© endostock - Fotolia.com

their health conditions and return to work where possible. It has replaced Incapacity Benefit for new claimants, but if you already receive this, your benefits will continue for the time being unless your circumstances change. During the first 13 weeks, all but the most severely disabled claimants will have an assessment of their capability to work. They will also have an interview to determine their ability to work and need for support, such as treatment or workplace adjustments.

Severely disabled people will have claims decided on the basis of evidence from their GP instead of interviews and will not need to look for work unless they want to.

Other claimants will receive benefits, must take 'reasonable steps' to return to work, and will need to attend regular work-focused interviews.

Government advisers will be able to help to identify support and training to get claimants into work. See the Arthritis Care website for more information.

Income Support – Income Support is a means-tested benefit. It is available to those who are not entitled to ESA or find that it – or any other benefits, income or savings – are not enough to live on. This benefit is available to people aged between 16 and pensionable age 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 (whether you are working or not) and paying Council Tax you can claim Council Tax Benefit.

Tax Credits – Tax Credits are money you receive regularly from the government to help with everyday costs. To find out more about tax credits, call the Tax Credit Helpline on 0845 300 3900 or visit the HM Revenue and Customs website at 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 at state pension age. Extra amounts may be paid to people who care for others, are severely disabled or have certain housing costs.

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.

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

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, Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit and Council Tax benefit amongst others.

Job grant – This is a one-off payment if you start full-time work (at least 16 hours a week), after at least 26 weeks on Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance, or other benefits.

■ 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) to help with extra costs.

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.

This benefit is being reviewed and is planned to be replaced in 2013/14 with the Personal Independence Payment.

■ 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 Benefits 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

■ Adapting

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.

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. 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 and discussion forums may be useful.

■ 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.

I'm keen to retrain and do something different

There are a variety of government training programmes available. Ask for details at your local Jobcentre or equivalent. For the latest information go to www.direct.gov.uk or in Northern Ireland www.nidirect.gov.uk

Work-based learning programmes – There are several schemes in different parts of the UK that can help you to learn new skills, get work placements and gain new qualifications. If you are unemployed and actively looking for work, you might be able to get work experience and relevant qualifications at the same time. Ask for details at your local Jobcentre or equivalent.

There are also a wide range of residential courses for disabled people. These lead to nationally recognised qualifications. If you want to become self-employed, you can get advice and support and the

chance to learn a trade while still receiving benefits. 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, so ask your Jobcentre adviser for more details. You also receive a training allowance equivalent to your weekly benefit plus a training premium.

There are several voluntary programmes in England and Wales (Training for Work in Scotland) available through Jobcentres and delivered by nationally approved training organisations. 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 – ask at your local Jobcentre or equivalent.

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.

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. Learndirect provides regional information on courses, careers and funding.

Connexions (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 – New qualifications can make you more attractive to potential employers. Pursuing a subject is good exercise for the brain too. 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 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). The Prospects website is a good source of information on courses that are specifically work related (www.prospects.ac.uk).

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.

Support whilst you are studying/training – Many universities across the country offer disability services, including disability support officers.



photo: Open University

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

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), a UK-wide database of volunteering opportunities. You can search for voluntary projects in your local area based on your skills and interests.


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.

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



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



employment, allowing you to change your hours and take time off, without feeling worried that you may be sacked.

■ 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).

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

Our booklets are reviewed every 12-18 months. Please check our website for up-to-date information and reference sources or call 020 7380 6577.

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

Your local disability service team can be contacted through Jobcentres listed in the telephone directory (or see www.direct.gov.uk)

GENERAL

● Arthritis Care

UK office:

Tel: 020 7380 6500

South England office:

Tel: 0844 888 2111

Central England office:

Tel: 0115 952 5522

North England office:

Tel: 01924 882150

Northern Ireland office:

Tel: 028 9078 2940

Scotland office:

Tel: 0141 954 7776

Wales office:

Tel: 029 2044 4155

● Arthritis Research UK

Tel: 0300 790 0400

www.arthritisresearchuk.org

Funds medical research into arthritis and produces information.

● Assist UK

Tel: 0161 238 8776

www.assist-uk.org

Offers advice about choosing and obtaining equipment for disabled people. Contact to find your nearest Disabled Living Centre.

● DIAL UK

Tel: 01302 310123

www.dialuk.info

DIAL UK can give you details of your nearest disability advice and information service.

● Equality and Human Rights Commission

Wales: 0845 604 8810

England: 0845 604 6610

Scotland: 0845 604 5510

www.equalityhumanrights.com

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

● Equality Commission

Tel: 028 90 890 890

www.equalityni.org

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

● The Employer's Forum on Disability

Tel: 020 7403 3020

www.efd.org.uk

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

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

EQUIPMENT

- **AbilityNet**

Tel: 0800 269 545

www.abilitynet.org.uk

Advice and support to disabled people on accessing computer technology.

- **Disabled Living Foundation**

London W9 2HU.

Tel: 020 7289 6111

Helpline: 0845 130 9177

www.dlf.org.uk

Advice and information on equipment.

- **Remap**

Tel: 0845 130 0456

www.remap.org.uk

Provides specialised equipment for disabled people.

LEGAL ADVICE

- **The Disability Law Service**

Tel: 020 7791 9800

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

www.dls.org.uk

Provides free legal advice/representation to disabled people.

SELF-EMPLOYMENT

- **Flexible Support for Business (Wales)**

Tel: 03000 6 03000

www.business.wales.gov.uk

- **Business Gateway (Scotland)**

Tel: 0845 609 6611

www.bgateway.com

- **Business Link (England)**

Tel: 0845 600 9006

www.businesslink.gov.uk

- **Invest Northern Ireland**

Tel: 028 9023 9090

www.investni.com

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

- **Skills Funding Agency (England)**

Tel: 0845 377 5000

www.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk

- **Business skills hotline (Wales)**

Tel: 0845 606 6160

www.SkillsPeopleSuccess.com

- **Scottish Enterprise**

Tel: 0845 607 8787

www.scottish-enterprise.com

BENEFITS

- **Benefits Enquiry Line for disabled people**

Tel: 0800 88 22 00

Tel: 0800 220 674 (in Northern Ireland)

- **Disability Alliance**

Tel: 020 7247 8776

www.disabilityalliance.org

Provides information on benefits.

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

CAREERS ADVICE

● Directgov

General advice: 0800 100 900
<http://careersadvice.direct.gov.uk>
www.careerswales.com
Provides information on courses,
training, careers and looking for work.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

● Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

Tel: 0800 328 5050 (11.30am-1.30pm
Tuesday and 1.30pm-3.30pm Thursday)
www.skill.org.uk

Skill Scotland

Tel: 0131 475 2348

Skill Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9028 7000

Skill Wales

Tel: 02920 786506

● The Association of National Specialist Colleges

Tel: 0121 428 5050 to request a
directory
www.natspec.org.uk
Provides advice and guidance on
further, higher and continuing
education, training and employment
for disabled people.

ARTHRITIS CARE

Arthritis Care exists to support people with arthritis. We are the UK's largest charity working with and for all people who have arthritis. We offer support wherever you live in the UK.

It costs us £1.10 to provide you with this booklet. If you are able to access information online, you'll help us save money and the environment.

Get involved with us today if you can.

- Make a donation.
- Leave a legacy in your Will.
- Join as a member.
- Become a volunteer.
- Support us in your local area.
- Take part in events.
- Campaign on our behalf.
- Find out about our self-management training and support.
- Join our online discussion forum.
- Visit our website.
- Ring our confidential helpline.
- Join a local support group.

We exist for everyone with arthritis, but we rely on the support of people like you. If you would like to make a contribution to our work, please phone us on 020 7380 6540. Or you can donate online.

www.arthritiscare.org.uk



ARTHRITIS CARE

*Empowering
people with arthritis.*

**To find out more about
arthritis and Arthritis Care**

Freephone our confidential helpline

0808 800 4050

(weekdays 10am-4pm)

Visit our website

www.arthritiscare.org.uk

Published by Arthritis Care, 18 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HD

Last reviewed January 2011 ACR064 ISBN 978-1-903419-40-3

Registered Charity Nos. 206563 and SC038693