



How Arthritis Impacts Your Workers

The Need



Arthritis is a leading cause of disability in the US,¹ and it has been estimated that two-thirds of people with arthritis are of working age, 18 to 64.²



An aging workforce and the rise of sedentary work and lifestyle means that some workers are at higher risk for work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSD).³ MSDs include sprains, strains, low back pain, arthritis, and carpal tunnel syndrome.⁴



MSDs are associated with high costs to employers such as absenteeism, lost productivity, and increased health care, disability, and worker's compensation costs.⁴



According to the CDC, only 1 in 8 worksites address MSD, back pain, and arthritis through worksite wellness programs.⁵



Taking a proactive approach to finding and fixing hazards in the workplace may help build trust between management and workers.³

Employers can help reduce the economic and personal burden of arthritis through benefit plan designs, workplace policies and programs, and wellness and safety initiatives⁵ that are based on recommended treatment strategies.

Recommended Treatments from the American College of Rheumatology (ACR)*

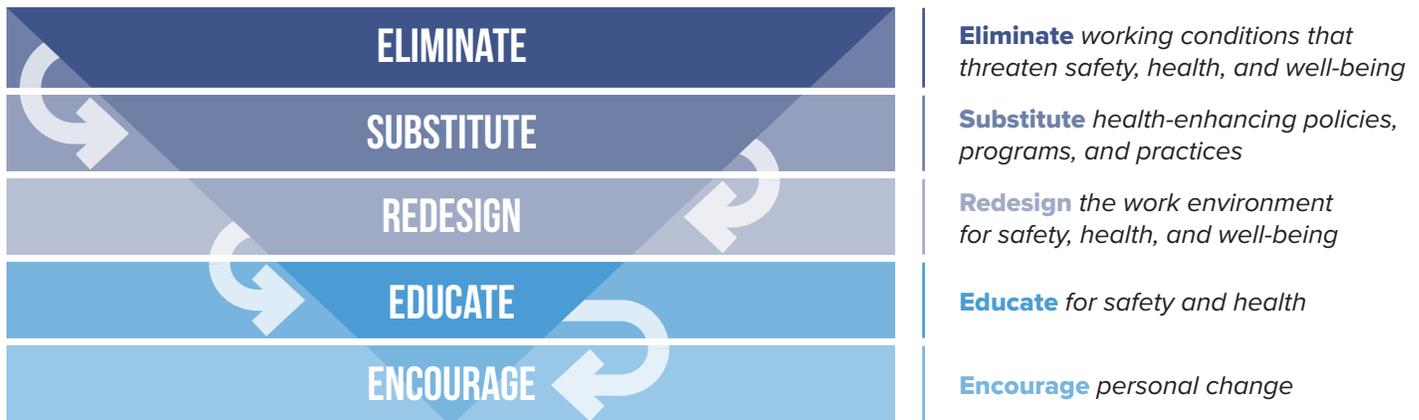
Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis, affecting 1 in 7 US adults.⁶ There is no cure for OA. Managing symptoms (e.g., pain, tenderness, and swelling) is essential for people living with the disease.

	Treatment	Hand	Knee	Hip
At-Home Treatments	Low-Impact Exercise	✓	✓	✓
	Weight Loss		✓	✓
	Tai Chi		✓	✓
	Injury Prevention Activities	✓	✓	✓
	Supportive Devices – Cane, braces, etc.	✓	✓	✓
	Self-management education	✓	✓	✓
	Therapeutic Heating/Cooling	✓	✓	✓
Support From A Professional	Yoga		✓	
	Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	✓	✓	✓
	Acupuncture	✓	✓	✓
	Kinesiotaping	✓	✓	✓
Pharmacologic Approaches	Physical & Occupational Therapy	✓	✓	✓
	Oral NSAIDs – Over the Counter or Prescription	✓	✓	✓
	Topical NSAIDs	✓	✓	
	Acetaminophen - Over the Counter or Prescription	✓	✓	✓
	Tramadol or Duloxetine	✓	✓	✓
Surgical Options	Corticosteroid Injections	✓	✓	✓
	Surgery	✓	✓	✓
	Joint Replacement	✓	✓	✓

*Adapted from Kolasinski SL, et al. *Arthritis Care Res (Hoboken)*. 2020; 72(2):149-162. This information is for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace discussions between a patient and their healthcare provider. NSAIDs= Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g., ibuprofen, naproxen sodium).

Is your workplace arthritis-inclusive?

The safety and health of your workforce can be improved by prioritizing efforts around the **Hierarchy of Controls Applied to NIOSH Total Worker Health**.⁷



NIOSH 20160. Fundamentals of total worker health approaches: essential elements for advancing worker safety, health, and well-being. By Lee MP, Hudson H, Richards R, Chang CC, Chosewood LC, Schill AL, on behalf of the NIOSH Office for Total Worker Health. Cincinnati, OH: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2017-112. Freely available on the [web](#).

Eliminate

Eliminate unnecessary employee movements that increase the risk of OA and exacerbate symptoms such as heavy lifting, squatting, kneeling, climbing,⁸⁻¹⁰ jumping, and full-body vibrations.¹¹ Draft and approve a [modified duty/return-to-work policy](#),¹² allowing employees to switch to physically less-demanding jobs.

Substitute

Implement safety and ergonomic assessments and programs. Build in and encourage work breaks,¹³ job switching,¹³ and mental health support for employees to help with depression and stress. Conduct non-punitive job fit assessments to help match employees' abilities with job duties.¹³ Encourage supervisors to support walking during the workday, including [walking meetings](#).

Redesign

Use smaller packaging to make for lighter loads and mechanical devices such as lifts and tractors⁸. Offer [Ergonomic Assessments and Provide Accommodations](#)¹⁴ and Assistive Technology¹⁵ such as standing desks,¹⁶ ergonomic chairs, keyboard rests, foot rests, and desk organizers.¹⁴

Educate

Educate employees about OA management and prevention strategies, safe lifting practices, joint protection activities such as rest breaks and activity pacing. Provide information about the services and benefits beneficial for people with OA that are offered through the employer's health insurance or wellness initiatives.

Encourage

Encourage employees to engage in healthy lifestyle habits such as weight loss, physical activity, and medication adherence, activities that will not only improve joint health but overall health as well.

There is no cure for arthritis. Therefore, it is important to consider benefits plans, workplace policies, and safety and wellness initiatives⁵ that may help workers manage musculoskeletal conditions.



For more information on redesigning your workplace to improve the safety and health of your employees, consult a [NIOSH Center of Excellence for Total Worker Health](#).^{*}

For resources to share with your employees on managing and preventing OA, visit www.oacaretools.org.

OAAA collaborated with Pfizer in the development of this resource.

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