



Department of Physiotherapy

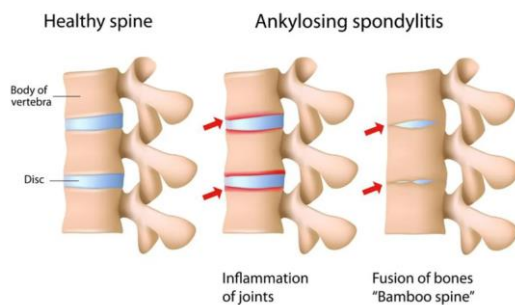
## AXIAL SPONDYLOARTHRITIS (AxSpA)

### WHAT IS AXIAL SPONDYLOARTHRITIS (AxSpA)?

Axial Spondyloarthritis (AxSpA) is a type of chronic autoimmune disease that causes inflammation in the joints and ligaments of the spine and at the sacroiliac joint (SIJ). This results in pain and stiffness in the neck and lower back and can even progress to fusion of the spine. There are two types of AxSpA; the non-radiographic AxSpA, where changes in the spine are not visible on scans; and radiographic AxSpA, also known as Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS). AxSpA is a complex condition and is a result of an immune response in which the body's immune system attacks its own healthy cells.

### ANATOMY

With AxSpA, there is inflammation in the joints of the spine. The inflammation can result in calcification and fibrosis which can cause the fusion of the vertebrae and lead to loss of mobility in the spine.



### PROGNOSIS

Currently, there is no cure for AxSpA. However, recommended treatments include medications to manage pain and inflammation, as well as lifestyle changes and exercises to maintain flexibility in the spine. These can help to reduce symptoms and decrease limitations in everyday activities, ensuring the ability to lead an active life. As new and more effective treatments become available, early diagnosis and

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Pain and stiffness in lower back/ hips or neck > 3 months
- Pain worsens with long periods of rest and inactivity and improves with movement
- Night pain and morning joint stiffness that lasts more than 30 minutes
- Changes in posture
- Pain and stiffness may also develop in other joints such as shoulders, knees and hips
- Fatigue, fever, loss of appetite, weight loss, skin rashes
- Vision changes and inflammation in the eye

### AGGRAVATING FACTORS

- Prolonged period of inactivity
- Stress
- Recent infection/flare up
- pace your exercise/activities to accommodate the painful joint during your flare up

### COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT AxSpA

#### 1. Spinal fusion is unavoidable when you have AxSpA

- While it is true that bone spurs and spinal fusions may occur as a result of AxSpA, early interventions and movement can help slow down the progression of AXSPA and reduce the chance of fusion

#### 2. I should not exercise or move during a flare-up

- Gentle exercises and movement during flare up are helpful
- You can modify/pace your exercise/activities to accommodate the painful joint during your flare up

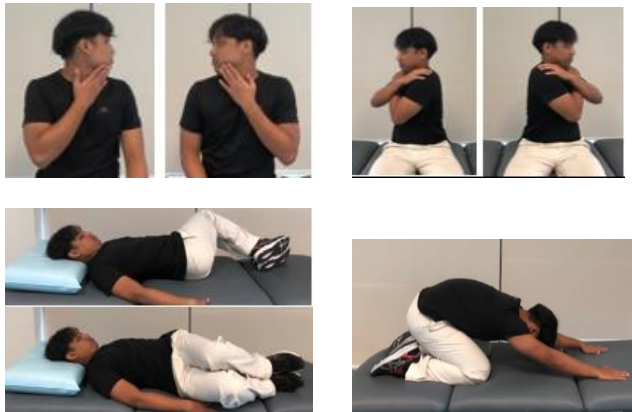
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### PHYSIOTHERAPY CAN HELP BY:

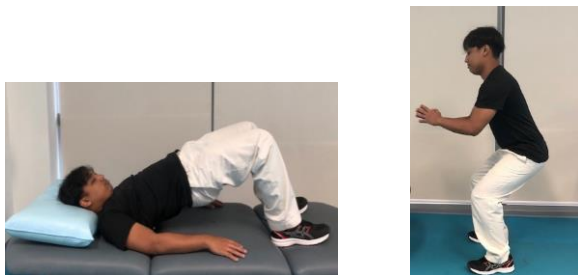
- Identifying risk factors that are contributing to your condition,
- Prescribing home exercises tailored to your condition.
- Providing advice to help you manage the

### MANAGEMENT/TREATMENT

- Regular exercises help to improve or maintain your movement in spine, improve fitness and reduce pain.
- **Flexibility exercises** help to improve or maintain your spine movement and reduce pain.



- **Strengthening exercises** help to improve or maintain your strength and reduce pain.



- **Aerobic exercises** such as walking, cycling and swimming help to improve your endurance and fitness.

### MANAGING FLARE-UPS

- Take medication at the doses you've been prescribed
- Do gentle exercise
- Apply ice pack on your joint for 15-20 minutes
- Pace between your activity
- Let people around you know, so that they can help and support you
- Consult your doctor if you have a regular flare up

### TIPS TO HELP YOURSELF

- Prioritise the things you need to do and spend energy on the most important activities
- Strike a balance between exercise and rest
- Live a healthy life. Eat a healthy diet, stop smoking and reduce stress to help your overall health and well-being
- Maintain a positive mindset while acknowledging your feelings
- Stay active by exploring other ways to remain active, eg: swimming/cycling.

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