

Working with axial SpA

Weds 30 March 2022



Working with axial SpA

Introduction



This is a big topic and everyone will have very varied experiences

I'll be discussing:

- Working with axial SpA
- Some of the barriers people face
- Your rights
- How to access further support

Introduction

Why is work important and how does axial SpA impact it?

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How can axial SpA affect your work?

Axial SpA affects everyone differently. Similarly, it impacts work life differently.

Most common issues affecting work:

- Pain and stiffness, particularly in the mornings
- Sitting or standing in one place
- Mobility impairments
- Fatigue, reduced stamina
- Axial SpA flares



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Making a decision



It's important to take your time when making any decisions about work.

Particularly if you:

- Are awaiting a diagnosis
- Are newly diagnosed
- Are starting/switching treatments
- Are having a particularly bad flare

Your rights

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The Equality Act

You're considered to be disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do daily activities.

If you're unsure if you're covered by the Equality Act, contact the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#).

It is against the law for employers to discriminate against you because of a disability.

In Northern Ireland, you are protected by the [Disabilities Discrimination Act](#) (DDA).

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Recruitment

When recruiting staff, an employer may make limited enquiries about your health or disability.

You can only be asked about your health or disability:

- To decide if you can carry out a task that is an essential part of the work
- To help find out if you can take part in an interview or if the interviewers need to make reasonable adjustments for you in a selection process
- If they want to increase the number of disabled people they want to employ
- If they need to know for the purposes of national security checks

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Starting a new job

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.

An employer has to make 'reasonable adjustments'.

We recommend joining a union, so that you have support in the future if needed.

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How can your workplace adjust?

What counts as 'reasonable adjustments' will vary depending on:

- Your needs
- The nature of your work
- The size and location of your employer
- How long you have worked for your employer



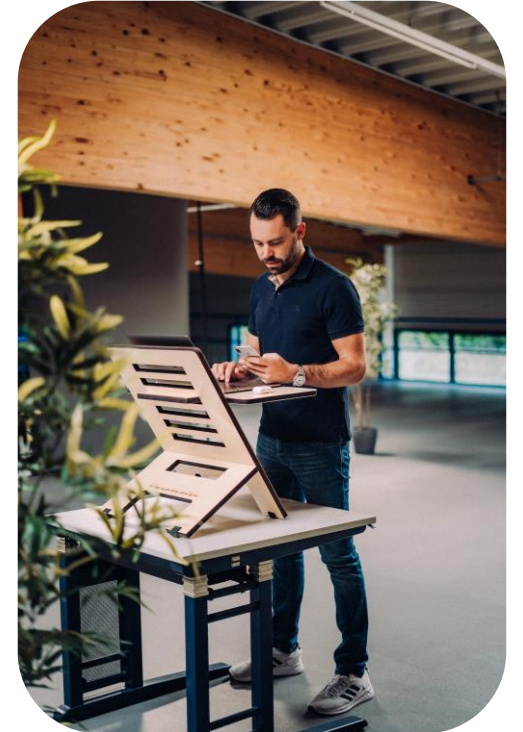
It's important to assess how your axial SpA affects you personally.

You can get help from specialist organisations, such as [Access to Work](#).

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Examples of workplace adjustments

- Workplace assessment with an occupational therapist
- Providing specialist equipment, such as an adapted chair or desk
- Short, regular breaks to stretch
- Flexible working hours
- Hybrid working
- Reallocating duties
- Provide opportunities for you to re-train for a different role



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Resolving conflict



If your employer is being unreasonable and the situation cannot be resolved informally, you can raise the matter as a formal grievance.

It is vital to seek further support and guidance, for example from your local [Citizen's Advice](#).

Time off work

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Time off due to illness

- If you are employed and off for four working days or more in a row and you earn more than £118 a week, you will be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)
- Your contract of employment may give you extra rights to more sick pay than this (contractual sick pay). You should check your contract to see what you are entitled to

Time off for medical appointments

- Your employer may allow you time off work for medical appointments but they are not legally required to do so unless specified in your contract of employment
- If you are covered under the Equality Act for your axial SpA and your employer will not let you take time off for a medical appointment connected with your axial SpA or your disability, they could be breaking the law

Talking about your axial SpA at work

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An invisible condition?

Axial SpA affects everyone differently.

When your pain and fatigue aren't easily visible to other people, it can help to discuss your condition with family, friends and work colleagues to help them understand.



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Talking to your employer

- You're not legally obliged to tell your employer that you have axial SpA unless it presents a health and safety risk
- However, you must not mislead your employer and you have a duty to answer medical questions honestly
- It's important to get the right advice and support at an early stage
- Our [Employer's Guide](#) can be helpful
- Have these conversations on a day when you're not flaring, if possible



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Joining a union

If you are a member of a union do approach your union representative.

They should be able to:

- Clarify your rights
- Help with discussing your problems with your employer



If you are not a member of a union, do consider joining before you encounter any problems as some unions may not provide support or legal advice for pre-existing problems.

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Talking to colleagues

- Deciding on the right time to talk about your axial to your colleagues depends on the severity of your axial SpA and your personal feelings.
- Some people prefer to be upfront as soon as they are diagnosed, while others continue working for many years before they feel the need to tell their colleagues.
- Whatever you decide, bear in mind that it's hard for people to understand your problems if you don't discuss them.

Staying well at work

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Staying well at work

- 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
- If you work at a desk:
 - Set a reminder to take a stretch break
 - Walk to talk to colleagues, rather than email
 - Encourage people to have standing or walking meetings
 - Try a standing desk



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Keeping moving at work

- Walk or ride at least part of the way to work (walk or cycle if you can)
- If possible, take the stairs rather than a lift
- Do stretches when waiting
- Use your lunch time as a chance to get moving – block out time in your calendar
- In an active job, use your breaks as rest times
- If you're on your feet a lot, wear supportive shoes
- Consider a cushioned/gel mat to stand on



Managing your axial SpA

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Managing your axial SpA



- Make sure you're under the care of a rheumatologist
- Ask your rheumatologist to refer you to an Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist for advice
- Join your [local NASS branch](#) (or one of our online branches)

Resources and support

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Help and support

Take your time when making decisions about work.

- [Access to Work](#) can help pay for practical support so you can do your job
- [ACAS](#) provide up to date information, independent advice and can help you and your employer solve problems
- [Citizens Advice](#) provide free, independent and confidential advice and a range of up to date information
- [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) provides advice and information. They can help you decide if you're covered by the Equality Act 2010
- [Gov.uk](#)
- [NI Direct](#)

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Help and support

For help deciding if you're entitled to benefits, there are organisations such as [Turn2Us](#).

[Personal Independence Payment](#) (PIP): This is designed to help with some of the extra costs caused by a condition. It is not income-related and you can receive this while working.

[Employment and Support Allowance](#): Available to apply for if you are unable to work due to your condition.

[Blue Badge Parking](#): Allows you to park on single yellow lines and in street spaces with pay and display machines free of charge.

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Help and support from NASS

Garry Williams at NASS can help you with:

- Supporting impact letter to your employer
- Applying for medical or ill health retirement packages (if they're part of your contract)
- Supporting letter when applying for benefits related to your axial SpA and Blue Badge applications

Contact Garry: garry@nass.co.uk

We can also send guides from *Benefits and Work* to NASS members about claiming PIP or ESA and appealing decisions

Questions?