

Axial Spondyloarthritis (axial SpA)

Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS)

Employers' Guide

What is AS?



AS is a painful, progressive form of inflammatory arthritis. It mainly affects the spine but can also affect other joints, tendons and ligaments. Other areas such as the eyes, bowel, lungs and heart can also be involved with AS. Symptoms usually begin in early adult life, with the average age of diagnosis being 24. AS affects an estimated 200,000 people in the UK.

AS is a very variable condition. Some people with AS have virtually no symptoms whereas others suffer much more severely. Generally people find that their symptoms come and go over many years. It is managed by a combination of pain relief and stretching exercises, however there is currently no cure.

Does AS affect your employees ability to do their job?

Many people with AS continue to have normal working lives. However, some common problems for people with AS in the workplace include:

- Pain and stiffness in the mornings means it is hard to get going first thing, which may lead to problems getting to work early
- Sitting in one place or position can lead to pain and stiffness
- Problems with carrying out heavy manual work
- Not having the same amount energy or stamina and getting fatigued easily

AS, especially in its early stages, can be an invisible condition. People with AS are often battling on a daily basis against pain, stiffness and fatigue. This can lead to feelings of isolation, particularly just after diagnosis.

As well as the inevitable pain of the disease, AS often generates feelings of frustration and fear. To help them adjust to their diagnosis it is important that they have the support and encouragement of family, friends and work colleagues.

Flare-ups

Even when AS is well managed, people can experience a 'flare up' of the condition. Flares can occur suddenly and without any warning signs: a person can be at work one day and be physically unable to get out of bed the next. Flares usually subside within a couple of days but their frequency and severity varies greatly between individuals.

Flares are often a difficult aspect of AS for colleagues to understand, particularly as a person experiencing a flare can look exactly the same as usual.

Providing a supportive work environment

There are a range of ways that you can support your employee in the workplace:

- Arrange a workplace assessment with an occupational therapist. They may well be able to make some simple suggestions that make a lot of difference
- Allow your employee to take regular short breaks from their workstation to stretch
- Flexible working hours, particularly a later start, can help the employee to cope better with their life and may mean they feel less tired. There may also be times during flare-ups of their illness when shorter working hours or, where possible, working from home would be helpful
- Travel can be a key issue for some people. They may find it difficult to take public transport and prefer to drive to work or to meetings

Support for you

Access to Work is a specialist disability service providing financial support beyond the reasonable adjustments an employer is legally obliged to provide.

Fit for Work is a free service providing occupational health assessment and general health and work advice to employees, employers and GPs.

Find out more by visiting www.gov.uk.

The benefits to your business

Supporting your employee to continue working with their AS has a number of benefits:

- retain a skilled and valuable employee, saving both time and money recruiting a replacement
- increased productivity from your employee
- reduced sick leave
- encourage a diverse and varied workplace

Is AS covered by the Equality Act 2010?

Under the Equality Act a person has a disability if they have 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.

AS is a condition which varies widely from one individual to another but where people have moderate to severe AS which impacts on their ability to carry out normal daily activities, they are likely to be covered by the Equality Act and will be entitled to reasonable adjustments at work.

In Northern Ireland, the Disabilities Discrimination Act applies. Visit www.nidirect.gov for more information.

How can your company support NASS?

NASS does not receive any government funding and relies solely on donations from its supporters to carry out our work for people affected by AS.

Supporting NASS is a great way to motivate and engage staff through a range of fun and simple fundraising activities, whilst raising vital awareness of AS. Your support will also help to meet your social responsibility objectives, increase engagement with new and existing customers, create positive PR opportunities and build relationships with colleagues.

Here are some ways that you and your company can help NASS to continue supporting all those affected by AS.

Payroll Giving

Payroll Giving is an easy, tax-effective way to give to NASS. It enables employees to donate straight from their gross salary (before tax is deducted), and to receive immediate tax relief of up to £5 for every £10 donated, and it's easy to opt in and out of.



If you don't have a payroll giving programme, there is useful information on how to set one up on the Payroll Giving Centre website at www.payrollgivingcentre.org.uk.

Matched Funding

This is a really simple way to make a big difference to fundraising events that your employees take part in, potentially doubling their fundraising total.

Employee fundraising

Unite colleagues by holding a fun event to support NASS. For example, these could be cake sales, quiz nights or dress down days, with all donations coming to NASS. Alternatively, you can take part in a team challenge, such as a sponsored run or cycle. It's a great opportunity to help raise awareness of AS amongst colleagues, whilst raising vital funds for NASS.



The NASS HELPLINE
is open 09:00 to 12:00 Monday to Friday

CALL 020 8741 1515

EMAIL: asknass@nass.co.uk

WEB: www.nass.co.uk

NATIONAL ANKYLOSING SPONDYLITIS SOCIETY