



# Treatment options



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# Treatment options

Recommendations for the management of axSpA say that exercise and medications are important. This may require life-style changes for optimal outcomes.

## *Why take medication?*

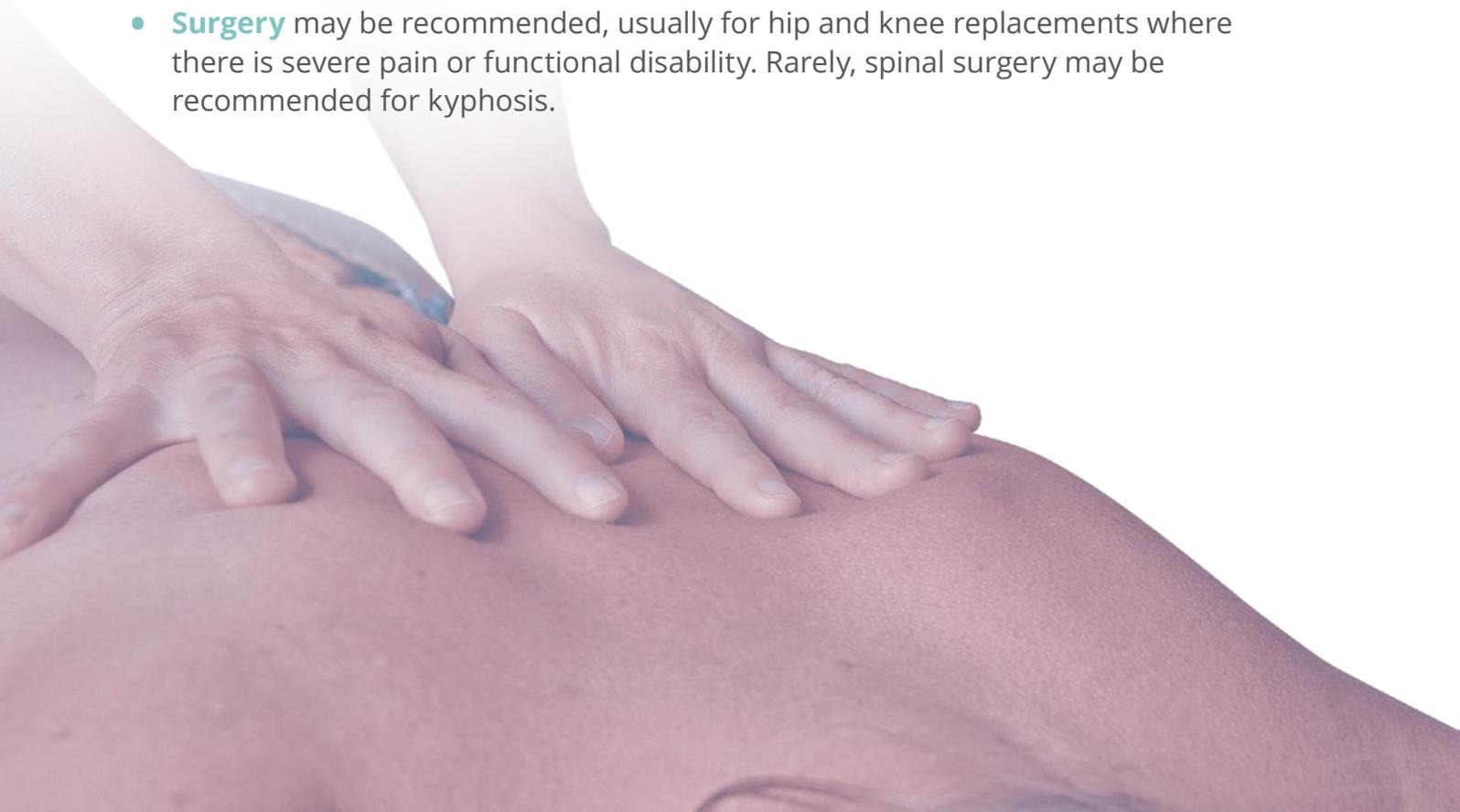
Medications recommended for axSpA can help with reducing inflammation and relieving pain. However, they cannot cure or reverse the effects of the disease.

## Pharmacological Treatments

- **NSAIDs** or **Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs** are often the first treatment option because they are effective in reducing pain and stiffness. COX-2 inhibitors are a type of NSAID. NSAIDs include Ibuprofen, naproxen, diclofenac and meloxicam. Speak to your doctor about how to take NSAIDS, their side-effects and risks.
- Local **glucocorticoid** (a class of steroids) injections may be prescribed for persistent joint inflammation, but long-term treatment by glucocorticoids is not recommended and should be discussed with your doctor.
- **Analgesics** (general pain relievers) may be prescribed in combination with other treatments that have not adequately controlled the pain.
- **Biologics** or **biosimilars** (also called anti-TNF or IL 17 inhibitors) are made from live organisms and first became available in the late 1990s. They are usually taken by infusion or injection in doses and at intervals determined by your rheumatologist.
- **Disease-Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drugs (DMARDs)** include methotrexate and sulfasalazine. Despite being more effective for peripheral disease, some axSpA patients are still prescribed DMARDs.
- A special type of DMARD are **JAK Inhibitors**, which are taken in pill form and are relatively new in the treatment of axSpA; they are not approved in all countries.

## Non-pharmacological Treatments

- **Exercise.** The role of exercise in managing your disease cannot be emphasised enough. Exercise is important to maintain flexibility, range of motion and good posture. Exercise has many other benefits such as reducing pain, stiffness and fatigue. Remember that any activity is better than no activity; that exercising in a group is often better than exercising alone, and that any exercise plan should ideally include elements of stretching, strength and stamina.
- **Physiotherapy.** Physiotherapy can help rehabilitation after specific physical issues and maintaining an appropriate exercise programme.
- **Education.** Research shows that finding out more about your disease and how to manage it will result in a better outcome. Education starts with getting the right information from your rheumatologist and healthcare providers. Visit [our website](#) for links to axSpA patient organisation websites and for other educational resources.
- **Patient associations.** Evidence shows that membership in a patient organisation improves your disease outcome. Patient organisations provide valuable information about axSpA, the opportunities to attend educational forums and meet with others with the disease.
- **Self-help groups** can be in-person, or virtual, or forums on social media. Opportunities to talk to others to share symptoms, treatments, coping strategies, information and tips can be beneficial.
- **Surgery** may be recommended, usually for hip and knee replacements where there is severe pain or functional disability. Rarely, spinal surgery may be recommended for kyphosis.



## Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)

Patients with axSpA frequently use CAM to either complement or as an alternative to conventional medicine. They do so to relieve their symptoms and improve their health. A few CAM treatments are addressed below.

- **Acupuncture** may provide some short-term relief from pain, but evidence for its use in axSpA is lacking.
- **Cannabis.** In some areas of the world, medical cannabis is legal. While cannabis can't cure axSpA or slow disease progression, some people report that it helps to alleviate their symptoms.
- **Chiropractor.** Some people find chiropractic care beneficial, but spinal manipulations should be avoided, particularly if you have osteoporosis, bony growths, fusion of the spine, or neck instability.
- **Massage therapy,** or manipulation of the soft tissues of the body, has shown to be effective in muscle relaxation and pain relief, particularly for deep tissue massage. However, results are generally short-term.
- **Meditation and mindfulness.** Research has shown that mindfulness and meditation can help individuals better manage arthritis pain. Mindfulness can be as little as taking a purposeful pause from your day to as much as changing your lifestyle.
- **Natural health products and nutritional supplements.** There is a lack of good evidence for the role of CAM diets, including supplements and herbal remedies, and there could be a risk of them affecting the benefits of conventional medicines. Some people report good results from following the Low/No Starch Diet and other diets, but they may not work for everyone.
- **Osteopathy** may help to relieve pain and stiffness caused by axSpA; it works by moving, stretching and massaging a person's muscles and joints.

This list is not exhaustive and there may be other treatments that are used in various parts of the world. Complementary and alternative medicine may offer some people relief from symptoms. Before starting any new therapy, think about what you want to achieve from it and do your own research.



## Disclaimer

This material is for information and education purposes only. It is not medical advice and does not replace consulting with a doctor or healthcare professional.

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