

JOINT MATTERS AT WORK

CHECKLISTS

How to Deal with Arthritis and
Persistent Musculoskeletal Disorders
in the Work Place

**A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYEES
AND HEALTH-CARE PROVIDERS**

JOINT MATTERS AT WORK CHECKLISTS

How to deal with arthritis and persistent musculoskeletal disorders in the work place: A guide for employers, employees and health-care providers

These checklists will help make arthritis and persistent musculoskeletal disorders a regular conversation topic between employers, employees and their health-care providers.

Guiding Factors

The checklists are based on these six factors:

1. Anyone living with arthritis can work at nearly any type of job, although sometimes specific adjustments are helpful.
2. Work provides purpose, socialization and potentially greater wellbeing, in addition to an income. This can positively impact individuals, their families, their employers and society as well.
3. According to the United Nations, meaningful employment is a human right. In Canada, about 90% of employees are protected by provincial or territorial employment laws.
4. Maintaining employment, job reinstatement and planning are shared responsibilities between employers and employees, and, where relevant, unions and insurance companies and/or provincial/territorial employee compensation programs.
5. Early clinical interventions that prioritize the importance of work are important to the employee's return to the job.
6. Work is a key aspect of clinical care and approach to treatment.

About the Joint Matters at Work Checklists

These checklists were developed through a multidisciplinary approach with the cooperation of various stakeholders. Employee and employer are at the core, but they extend to health-care providers, occupational health/human resources, insurance providers, unions, etc. For ease of use, the checklists for all stakeholders are compiled in one publication. Reflected in the design is the fact that not all employees have access to all involved stakeholders.

Regulations and Employment Law

In Canada work is governed by Federal and Provincial/Territorial laws and regulations.

“What employment rights are protected by employment standards legislation?”

Employment standards legislation covers rights in areas such as hours of work and overtime pay, minimum wage, pay, vacation time and vacation pay, public holidays, coffee and meal breaks, pregnancy leave and parental leave, personal emergency leave, family medical leave, termination notice and termination pay.¹

“Do all employees have the same employment rights?”

No. Some categories of employees may be subject to a variation in the employment standard or excluded from one or more of the laws. For example, farm employees may be paid a piece rate instead of a minimum wage, and in most provinces they are not eligible for overtime or public holiday pay. Other categories of employees that could have different employment rights include commercial fishers, oil field employees, loggers, home care givers, professionals, managers and some categories of salespersons.²

For more on provincial/territorial laws relating to work, contact your labour ministry via www.labour.gc.ca/eng/regulated.shtml.

¹ Government of Canada, Workers Rights in Canada, December 2007; sourced on July 22, 2014 from http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/about/publication/workers_rights.shtml

² Government of Canada, Workers Rights in Canada, December 2007; sourced on July 22, 2014 from http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/about/publication/workers_rights.shtml

CHECKLIST EMPLOYEE

- Try to keep working, if not full-time, as many hours as you are able.
- You are not legally obligated to disclose health conditions, however, being open about your condition has shown to help people remain actively employed. Consider your options.
- Be open about your condition and discuss your strengths and limitations and how to keep you working productively.
- Discuss with your health-care providers how your condition may affect your ability work and your expectations about working.
- Discuss with your health-care providers how your treatments may impact your ability to work, including any side effects of medications that affect alertness.
- You may ask your employer’s occupational health/human resource staff to contact your health-care providers to discuss the above. (This requires your consent.)
- Upon return to work, with or without restrictions, make sure work demands fit your abilities. Discuss the type, pacing and scheduling of work with both your health-care provider and employer. Try not to overexert yourself.
- When unable to work, maintain contact with your employer. Clarify what will be communicated to staff during your leave and how to stay in touch with colleagues if you wish.
- Make every effort to improve/maintain joint health — including remaining physically active, which is important to keep joints healthy, manage pain, limit fatigue and improve your mental outlook. Set up an exercise plan with your health-care provider.



CHECKLIST

EMPLOYER

As a manager, you have a strong influence on an employee's ability to work. Start by understanding what type of work your employee can do, as well as how much.

- Work with your employee to establish what can be done to maintain full or partial employment.
- When possible and appropriate, avoid full or partial sick/disability leave as this can have a prolonged negative impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of an employee and the financial wellbeing of all parties.
- Help your employee determine how medical treatments may affect his or her work.
- With your employee's consent, an occupational health doctor/nurse, human resources, and/or insurance carrier can contact the treating physician about possible consequences of the condition and treatments on your employees ability to work.
- With your employees consent, ask your employee's health-care providers for specific guidance as to his or her ability to work. Consider a three-way conversation with the employee and the health professional to discuss available options to help the situation.
- If your employee cannot continue working at present, establish how to maintain contact and how co-workers will be informed during the employee's sick/disability leave.
- Consider implementing a program for staff that addresses arthritis or other chronic diseases and the impact.



HELPFUL RESOURCES

- education.arthritis.ca
or arthritis.ca

CHECKLIST

FAMILY PHYSICIAN/ PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER

Primary health-care providers play a key role in helping patients stay at work, or return to work, in a productive yet safe capacity.³

- If your patient is actively employed, determine the demands of their work, the work environment, and the extent to which your patient values their job.
- Determine if there is a relationship between the condition and your patient's work.
 - How might the condition affect work?
 - How does work (both physical and psychological factors), hours on the job and the environment affect the condition?
 - What impact could treatments have on your patient's ability to work?
 - How do the condition/treatments impact your patient's overall quality of life?
 - What impact could a medical leave or loss of employment exert, over the short- and long-term?
 - Does your patient understand the effects of his/her condition on work, and how to cope?
- If required, direct your patient to information on the rights and duties of the employer and employee related to medical leave or disability.
 - HELPFUL RESOURCES** ■ www.labour.gc.ca/eng/regulated.shtml for provincial/territorial legislation
 - the patient's human resource department or union
- Ask your patient whether the condition and how it impacts his/her ability to work has been discussed with other health-care professionals. Relay the importance of addressing any concerns and learning as much as possible about this issue.
- Ask if your patient wants you to contact other health-care professionals involved in his/her treatment plan to discuss implications for work.
- Consider overall treatment plans that create minimal interference with work.
- Reiterate the importance of a healthy lifestyle, including exercise, and how it benefits disease management.
 - Refer patients to programs, information or specialists for added guidance and motivation.
- HELPFUL RESOURCES** ■ arthritis.ca or education.arthritis.ca
- Getting a Grip on Arthritis: OA and RA modules (an accredited clinician education program) www.mdcme.ca/grip (English only)

CHECKLIST MEDICAL SPECIALIST

Medical specialists play a key role in helping patients stay at work, or return to work, in a productive yet safe capacity.⁴



- If your patient is actively employed, determine the demands of their work, the work environment, and the extent to which your patient values their job.
 - How might the condition affect work?
 - How does work (both physical and psychological factors), hours on the job and the environment affect the condition?
 - What impact could treatments have on your patient's ability to work?
 - How do the condition/treatments impact your patient's overall quality of life?
 - What impact could a medical leave or loss of employment exert, over the short- and long-term?
 - Does your patient understand the effects of his/her condition on work, and how to cope?
- Where needed, direct your patient to information on the rights and duties of the employer and employee related to medical leave or work disability.
- Ask your patient whether the condition and how it impacts his/her ability to work has been discussed with other health-care professionals. Relay the importance of addressing any concerns and learning as much as possible about this issue.
- Ask if your patient wants you to contact other health-care professionals involved in his/her treatment plan to discuss implications for work.
- Consider overall treatment plans that create minimal interference with work.
- Reiterate the importance of a healthy lifestyle, including exercise, and how it benefits disease management.
 - Refer patients to programs, information or specialists for added guidance and motivation.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

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CHECKLIST

WORKPLACE

OCCUPATIONAL

HEALTH

(If the workplace does not have an occupational health specialist, this checklist may be used by the family physician/primary care provider, specialist, Human Resource department and/or the union.)



- Explain to the employee the importance of maintaining employment, the effects of a leave of absence and how you can support both employee and employer during this process.
- If required, direct your client to information on the rights and duties of the employer and employee related to medical leave or disability.
- Discuss the particulars of the employee's job, (both physical and psychological factors), hours on the job and working conditions.
- With the employee, assess any mental or physical strain associated with work and with joint problems. How does the employee deal with work (attitude, motivation, stress resistance) and how do they manage energy levels, time and social activities.
- Encourage the employee to explore with their health-care providers the effects of his or her condition and treatments on work. Does the employee wish for you to contact his/her physician regarding this?
- Explain that he/she may permit the workplace occupational health providers to provide information to their health-care providers.
- Explore options to adapt the employee's work and working environment.
- Reiterate the importance of a healthy lifestyle, including exercise, and how it benefits disease management. Refer patients to programs, information or specialists for added guidance and motivation.
- Advise the employer on the employee's ability to perform job duties. Determine where possible a sustainable balance between his or her abilities and the demands of the job.
- If despite all possible accommodations the condition does not allow the employee to perform required job duties, look for ways to assist the employer and employee in finding suitable work for the employee.

CHECKLIST

PHYSIOTHERAPIST

- Encourage your client to remain physically active or improve fitness levels, which will help them maintain their employment as long as possible.
 - Help your client to find suitable activities and programs that fit their needs and work demands. Offer encouragement and advice to help your client gain confidence to engage in activities and find enjoyment in exercise.
- Reiterate the importance of a healthy lifestyle, including exercise, and how it benefits disease management.
 - Discuss how you can assist your client with ways to cope with his/her condition, both at work and other aspects of their life.
- Discuss the particulars of your client's job, (both physical and psychological factors), hours on the job and working conditions to provide relevant treatment recommendations and goals that focus on his or her activities.
- Consider overall treatment plans that create minimal interference with work.
- With client consent, you may contact his or her health-care team about how the condition impacts your client's ability to work.
- If the client agrees, you may discuss job-related suggestions with the employer in order to improve the client's ability to work, healing and wellbeing.



CHECKLIST

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST/VOCATIONAL COUNSELOR

(If an occupational therapist or vocational counsellor is not available, this checklist may be used by the family physician/primary care provider, specialist and/or physiotherapist.)

- Guide your client toward finding suitable job duties and/or appropriate workplace modifications.
- Provide clarity in how current job duties and responsibilities may strain your client's abilities — and how job changes, accommodations or modification would be useful.
- If appropriate, discuss with both your client and the employer regarding his or her physical abilities related to the job requirements. (Consent required to contact the employer.)
- Support your client in setting realistic, sustainable goals for work while considering the impact of any changes on income.
- Where needed, direct your client to information on the rights and duties of the employer and employee related to medical leave or disability.
- Discuss the financial impact of working fewer hours, changing jobs or depending on disability payments.



CHECKLIST PSYCHOLOGIST/ COUNSELLOR

(If a psychologist/counsellor is not available, this checklist may be used by the family physician/primary care provider and/or specialist.)



- First establish:
 - What job duties does your client perform?
 - What is the work environment like?
 - How is your client's relationship with the employer and co-workers?
- When helping manage your client's distress, consider the importance of work to his or her lifestyle and wellbeing, and highlight the jobs that can still be performed.
- Where needed, direct your client to information on the rights and duties of the employer and employee related to medical leave or disability.
- Help your client better understand how the condition may impact others as well as their own wellbeing. Support him or her in setting realistic, sustainable goals for work and ways to achieve them.
- Address any mental health issues that could be negatively impacting your client's ability to work.
- Encourage your client to help self-manage their condition. Empower him/her to recognize how personal perceptions and behaviours can influence the ability to manage work and health. Counsel your client where there may be any permanent or long term restriction on his/her ability to work.
- Positively reinforce the importance of a healthy lifestyle and staying active while allowing time to relax and recharge.

The Arthritis Society has been setting lives in motion for over 65 years. Dedicated to a vision of living well while creating a future without arthritis, The Society is Canada's principal health charity providing education, programs and support to the over 4.6 million Canadians living with arthritis. Since its founding in 1948, The Society has been the largest non-government funder of arthritis research in Canada, investing nearly \$190 million in projects that have led to breakthroughs in the diagnosis, treatment and care of people with arthritis. The Arthritis Society is accredited under Imagine Canada's Standards Program. For more information and to make a donation, visit arthritis.ca.

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