

Ankylosing Spondylitis

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Ankylosing spondylitis is a type of joint disease (arthritis) that primarily affects the spine, especially the lower portion and joint at the base of the spine, the sacroiliac. It can affect other joints. It causes inflammation (swelling, tenderness, and warmth) and can eventually cause joints to fuse together. You are more likely to develop it if a family member has it and if you are a teen or young adult male. It is chronic and usually gets worse over time. Treatment can delay or control symptoms but there is no cure.

Symptoms may include:

Mild to severe symptoms

- Pain and stiffness in the lower back that are generally worsen in the morning
- A "bent forward" position if joints in the back become fused and rigid
- Pain that extends from the low back to the neck
- Anemia, muscle stiffness, fatigue, weight loss, or loss of appetite
- Eye inflammation (uveitis) occurs in about 25% of people with the disease
- Joint and bone deformities
- Symptoms in other body systems
- Periods of flare-ups and remissions (symptom-free)

{mospagebreak title=What your doctor can do}

What your doctor can do:

- Diagnose the disease by asking about your symptoms, performing a physical exam, and ordering laboratory blood tests and x-rays of the lower back.
- Prescribe non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, pain medicine, or muscle relaxants to help decrease inflammation and reduce pain.
- Order physical therapy to help you build strength and maintain good posture; to help with pain, stiffness, and prevention of deformity; and for breathing exercises to prevent breathing problems, if ribs are affected.

- Recommend surgery in certain cases.

{mospagebreak title=What you can do}

What you can do:

- Exercise regularly. Swimming is highly recommended. Water allows you to move painful areas more easily.
- Take warm baths or use warm compresses on joints before exercising.
- Avoid contact sports and any activities that put stress on the back.
- Sleep on your back on a firm mattress using a small pillow or none at all.
- Consult with your doctor about the benefits of massage or chiropractic care.
- Additional information is available from the Arthritis Foundation @ 1-800 283-7800 and from the Spondylitis Association @ 1-800 777-8189.

What you can expect:

- Treatment can reduce symptoms and help prevent deformity but there is no cure.
- Possible complications may include heart conduction or heart-valve problems, numbness in arms or legs from nerves being compressed, and for some, permanent disability.

Contact your doctor if you develop signs and symptoms of ankylosing spondylitis or if your symptoms worsen despite treatment.