

# TOOLKIT TO SURVIVE RHEUMATIC DISEASES IN THE WORKPLACE



Different tools can help you at work by relieving pressure and strain on joints. Here are some examples of different things you can try. These tips can be great for students too!

## For your hands and wrists

### Ergonomic mouse and keyboard

- To limit pressure and strain when using the computer



### Compression and heated gloves

- To provide relief from pain and stability



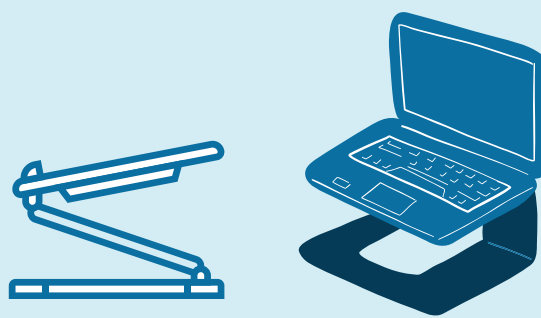
### Writing aids

- Including: speech recognition software such as Dragon, Read and Write
- To take off the strain of using hands to type



### Risers and trays

- For keyboards, laptops, and computer mice
- To relieve the pressure on hands/wrists while using the computer



Tools to help make work feel better!

## For your legs and ankles

### Footrest

- Helps with pressure and pain while sitting



### Walking pad

- Increase circulation and gently exercises joints



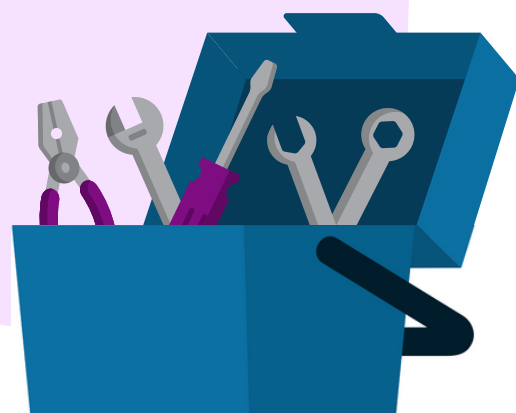
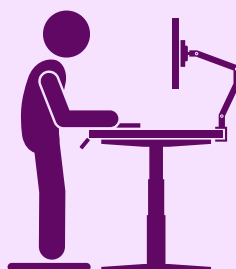
### Sit/stand desk

- To help with joint fatigue from sitting or standing

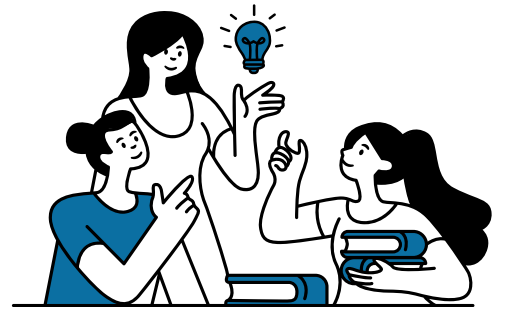


### Anti fatigue mat

- Helps with fatigue and pain when standing for a long period of time



# TIPS TO NAVIGATE RHEUMATIC DISEASES WHILE WORKING



## 1 Consider the type of job you want



Not all job options may be available, but it's important to know what options are out there.

### Virtual: Jobs performed entirely remote

- Allows flexibility in work-place location
- Eliminates the need to commute
- Autonomy over your schedule

### In-person: Job that require physical presence at workplace

- You get to have direct-interactions and collaborate with colleagues
- Often a structured environment

### Hybrid: Job that require both remote and in-person attendance

## 2 Set realistic expectations for yourself

### Tailor your work to your energy levels throughout the day

- Work on more demanding tasks when you feel alert
- Work on less demanding tasks when you feel less alert

## 3 Listen to your body

### If something causes discomfort or pain, take breaks

### Exercise your joints whenever you can

- Such as taking a walk when you are on a break, stretching, etc.

### Limit repetitive motions

### Maintain good posture while sitting and standing

## 4 Use time management techniques

### Strategies

- Create a schedule that allows for flexibility
- Integrate self-care into your routine

### Tools to explore

- There are many organization tools out there to discover, here are a few to try
  - Pomodoro timers
  - Schedules or planners
  - SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound)
  - 2-minute rule to reduce procrastination
  - Time blocking your schedule
  - There are also many more!



## 5 Take advantage of your workplace accommodations

### Accommodations are there to help you succeed

- Oftentimes workplaces can provide tools or resources to make your work more manageable



### Explore different accommodation options

- Depending on the job, workplaces can offer different options. Here are a few to explore or ask about
  - Change tasks to avoid repetition
  - Somewhere to sit for standing jobs, or somewhere to stand for sitting jobs
  - Ergonomic equipment
  - Resting areas
  - More frequent or extended breaks
  - Writing aids
  - Extra time to complete work
  - Assistance while completing specific tasks

## 6 Practice self-compassion



- **Be kind to yourself**
  - Especially when the symptoms are difficult to manage
- **Don't push yourself beyond your limit**
  - You can slow down or pace yourself
- **Have patience**
  - Be sure to remind yourself it's okay to ask for extra help
- **Celebrate your accomplishments**
  - No matter how small, you deserve to celebrate your achievements

## Interested in other resources? Check out CAPA resources here!



<https://arthritispatient.ca/en/arthritis-in-the-workplace-resources-for-patients-by-patients/>

**Ready to thrive at work? Implement these tips for a better work experience!**

Created by patients, for patients.

**CAPA**  
Canadian Arthritis  
Patient Alliance

**TAKE A  
PAIN  
CHECK**  
FOUNDATION

# TALKING TO LOVED ONES ABOUT YOUR RHEUMATIC ILLNESS



For those living with rheumatic conditions, or any chronic illness, it can be hard speaking to others about how rheumatic disease impacts our everyday lives and activities. Many fear being judged or viewed differently.



It can get **isolating** to handle things on your own, this is where learning to openly communicate with those close to you can build a strong **support system**.

## 1 The First Conversation: telling someone new about your illness

It is not easy **initiating** the first conversation about health with someone close to you. Whether you have been diagnosed for years, or have only recently been diagnosed, there are different things you can do to make that first conversation **easier**.

- Give a **general explanation** of your illness and the main ways it impacts you. Clearly explaining the conditions and symptoms can make it easier for the other person to understand. For example, if you have difficulty walking due to knee pain, **express** that limitation and **explain why** you experience the pain.
- **Explain why** you are telling them. Perhaps you want someone to talk to about it, or you want to make them aware about certain challenges you face when it comes to doing activities. This can help when you need **extra support**.



## 2 Keeping up the conversation

While physical symptoms are easy to list, the effect of chronic illness on one's **mental health** can be a different form of challenge. There are ways to maintain **open dialogue** about your condition, which can help with overall communication.

- **Be honest** about your emotions and tell people when a particular day is bad for you. Give them the **chance to listen** to your experiences as it can help them **empathize and offer support**.
- **Answer questions** but be aware of if it's the right moment to **discuss** these matters. To avoid uncomfortable situations, make sure to **plan ahead** and create a **safe space** for both of you.
- Know that you don't always have to justify your feelings: **it's ok** to struggle more on some days without any particular reason. Not knowing the "why" doesn't make your **feelings** any less valid.



There will always be people who **struggle to understand** your experience and may act or speak in hurtful ways simply out of a lack of **awareness**. Self-advocacy is when you speak up about how your experiences affect you with the hope that others will **understand**. Practising **self-advocacy** is important and you should never feel guilty for speaking up. Remember that you do not owe people your time and energy; there is nothing wrong with distancing yourself (when possible) from those who don't seem willing to listen. The ones who care will meet you half-way and **put in the effort** to learn.



# NAVIGATING ACCOMMODATIONS THROUGH SCHOOL

What accommodations are, who to go to, and what options might be offered.



## What are accommodations at school?

Being a youth with arthritis comes with specific challenges that can sometimes negatively affect your ability to thrive in school. With arthritis, every day can be different and frustrating to navigate, making it hard to complete school requirements.

Accommodations are often available through your school, and can give you access to various resources and extra help. This resource gives tips and suggestions to make school the best for you.



Individual education plans can be set up within your school. These specially designed plans are for students that outline any accommodations that can be used to help them succeed at school. Different schools have different names for these plans, be sure to reach out to your school to ask further questions.

## Tips for asking for accommodations!

**Talking with your doctor is a good start to get an idea of the options that might work best for you and who to approach at your school.**

- They may be able to support you by providing a letter of support to your school.

**High schools often have guidance counselors, and other education institutions, such as universities, often have accessibility offices.**

- These people are great starting points to ask about accommodations.

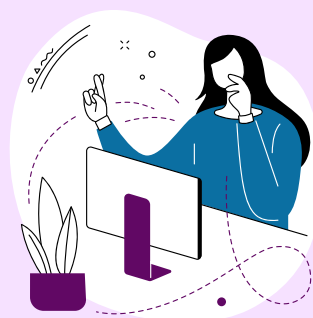
**Be clear of your needs and come prepared with accommodations that you think will meet your needs.**

**It is important to speak up and ask for what you need.**

- If your needs change it is possible to modify your accommodations by staying connected with your guidance/accessibility counselor.

**If you're unsure what accommodations to ask for, try finding some resources.**

- Check out the recommendations in this infographic!
- Reach out to a patient organization who can provide you with some guidance.
- Guidance/accessibility counselor might be able to provide suggestions.
- Be open to the different options, and be sure to keep trying things until you find something that works for you.



## Accommodations to consider

**Every school offers different accommodations so it is important to bring up your concerns to discover available options to help you succeed.**

**Some possible accommodations include:**

- Extra time on tests/exams and assignments.
- Quiet space to write exams with an option for rest breaks while writing.
- Access to class notes from other students.
- Access to assistive technology for taking notes or listening to lectures.
- Access to accessible transportation to and from school and around campus.
- Access to elevators in school.
- Access to two sets of textbooks to have one at home and one at school so that you do not have to carry them around.
- Access to online versions of textbooks.



**These are only a few accommodation examples and are not limited to this list so it is important to think about what you might find challenging at school and if you have any ideas it is important to bring them up when discussing with a counselor!**

# HOW TO MANAGE HIGH SCHOOL WITH A CHRONIC ILLNESS



These are just a few tips for navigating Highschool with a rheumatic condition. For in-depth information, visit our website for more!

## 1 Communicating with Teachers

Creating an action plan can help you and your teacher, especially if you are unable to attend school every day. You can meet with your teachers prior to or at the beginning of each semester to explain your situation and see how they can help. If you're unable to meet with them, sending a letter is a great way to start the conversation.

## 2 Missing School

Informing your teachers when you will be away helps them to plan and support you. This way they can send you class work or can find other ways to aid you during missed class time.



## 4 Individual Experiences

Informing others that rheumatic diseases affect people in different ways is important. One person's experience may not be the same as another's. Sharing your story and talking to others can help you and others receive needed and personalized support.



## 3 Connecting with Others

Sometimes it can be hard for those with chronic illnesses to connect with other students. It can often feel like your conditions can really limit what you're able to do and what you can participate in. Being transparent with others can help them understand and connect with you, here's an example.

*"Hey, I have this disease called arthritis which affects a lot of my joints making it hard for me to do a lot of the things that seem easy for you, but I am still willing to try."*

## 5 Learning Plans and Accommodations

Many schools have learning plans for students who may need more support, these can be referred to as Individual Education Plans (IEP) in some schools. Having a plan in place is a can ensure your needs are met and helps when informing your teachers. For more information, talk to your school counselor.

## 6 Resources for Others

Having resources available for your friends and teachers can also help them understand what you may be experiencing. Digital resources from patient organizations can be shared.



## 7 Remembering Everyone's Limits

It is important to always remember everyone is unique. Being aware that everyone has unique experiences and limitations, especially others with chronic illnesses. This can help you navigate both yours and others challenges.



## 8 Letting Others Support You

As you open up about your experiences and challenges to others, people may ask how they can support you. Sometimes it can be difficult to figure how others can support you - make sure to be honest and realistic. Many find that the best support from others is when they listen and keep an open mind during conversations. It is also important to remember that you can keep your conditions to yourself and shouldn't feel pressured to share.

