

# Common Concerns for People with Physical Disabilities

There are many common problems that are often experienced by people living with disabilities.

Visit [futurethinking.abilitycentre.com.au](http://futurethinking.abilitycentre.com.au) for more information.

Please note that this checklist is a guide only and should not replace a thorough assessment completed by health professionals.

Problem	How it may present	Possible treatment
<b>Pain and Fatigue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain in any part of the body</li> <li>• General tiredness at any time of day regardless of activity levels</li> <li>• Increasing difficulty in completing activities</li> <li>• Feeling weak, muscle tightness, struggling to keep up with others, increasing injuries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of pain source</li> <li>• Energy conservation – finding balance between activities and rest</li> <li>• Exercise and therapy to improve ability to move: stretching, strengthening, general fitness</li> <li>• Surgery</li> <li>• Medication</li> </ul>
<b>Arthritis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint pain during or after movement</li> <li>• Joint stiffness or tenderness</li> <li>• Restricted range of joint movement</li> <li>• Grating sensations when joint is moved</li> <li>• Hard lumps under the skin around the painful joint</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Podiatry, Orthotics all aim to reduce joint deterioration e.g. muscle strengthening, stretching, balance, rest, massage, mobility, good lifestyle habits, exercise</li> <li>• GP or specialist e.g. medications and general health management, surgery</li> </ul>
<b>Mental Illness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Low mood or sadness</li> <li>• Persistent feelings of stress and worry</li> <li>• Inability to get out and about</li> <li>• Lack of motivation or low energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Socialisation support</li> <li>• Recreation support</li> <li>• Life planning and support</li> <li>• Medication</li> </ul>

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Problem	How it may present	Possible treatment
<b>Neck</b> Subluxations Nerve entrapment Myelopathies Cervical instability Radiculopathies Spondylosis Spondylolisthesis Osteophytes Cervical stenosis Fractures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain, with or without movement</li> <li>• Feelings of neck instability</li> <li>• Decreased range of movement</li> <li>• Headaches that do not respond to medication</li> <li>• Unexplained dizziness or light-headedness</li> <li>• Pins and needles, numbness</li> <li>• Loss of strength over a short period of time</li> <li>• Changes in bladder or bowel control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical Review with possible investigations such as CT Scan or MRI</li> <li>• Consultation with GP, neurologist or neurosurgeon</li> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. neural lengthening, mobilisations, muscle and joint retraining, strengthening, stretching or ergonomics</li> <li>• Ultrasound, electrical stimulation or massage</li> <li>• Regular monitoring</li> <li>• Surgery with intensive rehabilitation</li> </ul>
<b>Mouth and Jaw</b> Pain Locked jaw Tooth and gum problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty with eating, chewing or feeding</li> <li>• Fatigue with eating</li> <li>• Jaw clicking, fatigue or locking</li> <li>• Neck pain</li> <li>• Headaches</li> <li>• Bruxism</li> <li>• Snoring</li> <li>• Speech difficulties</li> <li>• Tooth or gum pain</li> <li>• Tooth or gum infections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dental support for tooth and gum management</li> <li>• Equipment such as mouth guards</li> <li>• Speech pathology e.g. swallowing recommendations</li> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. mobilisation, massage and exercises</li> <li>• GP or specialist consultation e.g. medications, sleep review</li> </ul>
<b>Swallowing</b> Aspiration e.g. fibrosis of lungs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coughing when eating or drinking</li> <li>• Difficulty eating, chewing or feeding</li> <li>• Fatigue when eating</li> <li>• Speech difficulties</li> <li>• Avoiding some foods</li> <li>• Chest infections</li> <li>• Regular hospitalisation for chest infections</li> <li>• Regular antibiotic use</li> <li>• Difficulty controlling saliva</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speech pathology e.g. swallowing recommendations</li> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. respiratory management, positioning, exercise</li> <li>• Occupational therapy e.g. positioning</li> <li>• GP or specialist e.g. respiratory management</li> </ul>

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Problem	How it may present	Possible treatment
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty communicating with friends, family and carers</li> <li>• Difficulty using a communication board, tablet or other device</li> <li>• Inability to communicate with strangers or support staff</li> <li>• Frustration at not being understood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speech pathology, establishing ways to communicate</li> <li>• Occupational therapy, establishing ways to access communication systems and devices</li> </ul>
<b>Respiratory</b> Diseases of the respiratory system Upper airway obstruction e.g. sleep apnoea, acute airway obstruction Aspiration e.g. fibrosis of lungs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coughing when eating or drinking</li> <li>• Difficulty taking deep breaths or coughing</li> <li>• Inability to cough</li> <li>• Shortness of breath</li> <li>• Unusual tiredness</li> <li>• Chest infections</li> <li>• Regular antibiotic use</li> <li>• Snoring</li> <li>• Longer than average recovery time following minor illness</li> <li>• Hospitalisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speech pathology e.g. swallowing recommendations</li> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. respiratory management, positioning, exercise</li> <li>• Occupational therapy e.g. positioning</li> <li>• GP or specialist e.g. respiratory management including medication, inhalers, nebulisers, ventilators or CPAP, BiPAP and cough assist machines</li> </ul>
<b>Heart</b> Cardiovascular problems such as arterial hypertension, coronary artery disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headaches</li> <li>• Dizziness</li> <li>• Vertigo</li> <li>• Chest pain or discomfort which may extend to the arm, back, jaw or neck</li> <li>• Shortness of breath</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GP or specialist consultation for medication or surgery</li> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. exercise</li> <li>• Dietitian e.g. food recommendations</li> <li>• GP or specialist e.g. medication</li> <li>• Dietitian e.g. food recommendations</li> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. positioning and exercise</li> </ul>
<b>Gastrointestinal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflux</li> <li>• Burning in stomach tube</li> <li>• Constipation</li> <li>• Loose bowels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GP or specialist e.g. medication</li> <li>• Dietitian e.g. food recommendations</li> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. positioning and exercise</li> </ul>

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Problem	How it may present	Possible treatment
<b>Shoulders</b> Dislocations Instability Bursitis Frozen shoulder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain at rest or with movement</li> <li>• Difficulty lifting or carrying objects</li> <li>• Changes in posture</li> <li>• Shoulders not level</li> <li>• Inability to move arms away from body</li> <li>• Changes in ability to manage everyday tasks such as dressing or hanging out washing</li> <li>• Difficulty using elbow crutches or a four-wheeled walker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. pain management, postural support, muscle retraining, exercises, massage, electrical stimulation, task specific training, adjustments to mobility equipment, rehabilitation</li> <li>• Occupational therapy e.g. activity recommendations, adjustments to mobility equipment</li> <li>• GP or specialist consultation for medication or surgery</li> </ul>
<b>Scoliosis or kyphosis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain</li> <li>• Shoulders not level</li> <li>• Inability to sit upright or turn side to side</li> <li>• Ribs touching pelvis</li> <li>• Difficulty lifting head or standing tall</li> <li>• Difficulty taking deep breaths</li> <li>• Tiredness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. pain management, postural support, exercise, monitoring, seating systems, night time positioning, respiratory management</li> <li>• Occupational therapy e.g. seating and night time positioning support</li> <li>• GP or specialist consultation for long term monitoring of spine, x-rays, consideration of braces or surgery</li> <li>• Orthotics e.g. braces</li> </ul>
<b>Lower back / sacrum</b> Radiculopathies Nerve entrapment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tingling, pins and needles or numbness in lower legs</li> <li>• Changes in sensation</li> <li>• Changes in bladder and bowel control</li> <li>• Pain</li> <li>• Reduced mobility</li> <li>• Difficulty bending or lifting</li> <li>• Pain or discomfort when walking, climbing stairs or in transfers</li> <li>• Pain or discomfort in positions including lying, bending, standing or sitting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. neural lengthening, mobilisations, muscle and joint retraining, strengthening, stretching, ergonomics, ultrasound, electrical stimulation, massage and pain management</li> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. activity training, equipment for movement and positioning, seating, night time positioning</li> <li>• Occupational Therapy e.g. seating and night time positioning</li> <li>• GP or specialist consultation for medication, referral for orthopaedic or neurosurgery review and consideration of surgery</li> </ul>

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Problem	How it may present	Possible treatment
<p><b>Elbow, forearm and hands</b></p> <p>Muscle contractures</p> <p>Overuse syndromes e.g. tennis elbow, golfers elbow, carpal tunnel or ulnar nerve entrapment</p> <p>Finger changes e.g. swan neck deformities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain</li> <li>• Reduced range of movement in joints</li> <li>• Difficulty writing or typing</li> <li>• Aching, particularly at night</li> <li>• Difficulty moving thumbs</li> <li>• Pressure injuries on hands from fingers and thumbs</li> <li>• Difficulty spreading fingers and thumbs apart</li> <li>• Tightness in hands, fingers and thumbs</li> <li>• Poor or worsening grip strength</li> <li>• Reduced fine motor skills</li> <li>• Difficulties cleaning palms of hands</li> <li>• Skin breakdown in palms of hands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy e.g. pain management, taping, bracing, ultrasound, laser, exercise, stretching, muscle retraining, strengthening, ergonomic assessment, active and resting splints, hygiene strategies</li> <li>• GP or specialist consultation for medication or surgery</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hips and pelvis</b></p> <p>Pelvic obliquity</p> <p>Hip dislocation</p> <p>Hip displacement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arthritis</li> <li>• Pain</li> <li>• Reduced mobility</li> <li>• Pressure injuries – especially sitting bones, ribs, pelvis and tailbone</li> <li>• Changes in posture</li> <li>• Feelings on instability in hips</li> <li>• Difficulty sitting upright</li> <li>• Slipping forward while seated</li> <li>• Leg length discrepancy</li> <li>• Knees shifting to one side when seated or lying down</li> <li>• Changes in walking ability or mobility levels</li> <li>• Knee or lower back pain</li> <li>• Increase in falls or tripping</li> <li>• Feeling lopsided when standing</li> <li>• Limping or increased fatigue when walking</li> <li>• New need for a mobility aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy e.g. 24-hour positioning and movement support for seating, night time positioning, relaxation, exercise, stretching, strengthening, braces, footwear, gait and transfer training, monitoring</li> <li>• Medical specialists e.g. tendon releases, tendon transfers, osteotomies, hip replacements, Botulinum toxin therapy</li> </ul>

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Problem	How it may present	Possible treatment
<p><b>Knees</b></p> <p>Patella alta</p> <p>Patella fractures</p> <p>Patella displacement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain</li> <li>• Changes to walking ability</li> <li>• Difficulty using stairs</li> <li>• Increasing muscle fatigue with walking</li> <li>• High riding knee cap</li> <li>• Knee instability or sensations of knees 'giving way'</li> <li>• Clicking or grinding sounds</li> <li>• Tiredness with standing and walking</li> <li>• Needing to rest regularly</li> <li>• Increased muscular tightness in legs</li> <li>• Inability to straighten knees, preferring to keep knees bent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. pain management, stretching, strengthening, taping, bracing, mobilisation, massage, muscle retraining, activity retraining</li> <li>• GP or specialist consultation for medication or surgery such as tendon releases or realignment</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ankles and feet</b></p> <p>Flat feet</p> <p>Deformities to hind, mid or forefoot</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain, aching</li> <li>• Changes in walking patterns</li> <li>• Increase in falls or tripping</li> <li>• Reduced mobility</li> <li>• Swelling</li> <li>• Pain with walking or standing for long periods</li> <li>• Reduced balance</li> <li>• Difficulty finding comfortable footwear or wearing shoes out quickly</li> <li>• Skin problems relating to walking patterns and ill-fitting footwear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physiotherapy e.g. massage, stretches, strengthening, pain management, gait retraining, mobility equipment</li> <li>• Orthotics e.g. foot orthoses, ankle foot orthoses, seating and foot plate placement</li> <li>• Footwear e.g. specialised, customised</li> <li>• GP or specialist consultation for medication or surgery such as triple arthrodesis, tendon transfers, bony spur removal, bunion surgery, first metatarsal fusion or plantar fascia release</li> </ul>