

# Upper Limb Pain

The term 'musculoskeletal' refers to muscles and bones, and there are a range of common problems with muscles and bones that people with physical disabilities may experience.

Pain in the upper limbs – anywhere from the neck to the fingers – can affect movement, activities, independence and general quality of life.

Many people with physical disabilities rely on their arms for transfers and walking – for example, holding onto rails to transfer independently or using elbow crutches or a four-wheeled walker.

Generally, upper limb pain begins as a discomfort and increases. People often only take action when the pain stops them doing activities.

## What can I do?

It is important that early signs of pain are not ignored – support and pain management should begin as early as possible.

Physiotherapists and occupational therapists can assist you to find the best ways to do tasks such as transfers, walking, shopping, carrying heavy objects, lifting objects above head height, and activities such as cleaning or hanging out washing to decrease the risk of pain.

Therapists can treat pain, review activities and provide advice on techniques such as stretching, strengthening, massage, exercise and postural training.

## Consider other mobility devices

Many people think about how long they will be able to walk as they get older. For those that rely on their arms for transfers or walking, often the reason they are likely to stop transferring or walking is because their shoulder pain stops them rather than their legs.

To find balance and to manage your pain, using different mobility devices can help. Using a scooter or power wheelchair can give your arms a rest and help them recover.

Using a mobility device does not mean you won't continue to walk. For many, it is likely that you will be able to walk for more years than you would have if you didn't use a mobility device.



## Consider support from support workers

Another way to find balance is having someone else help you with the heavier or harder jobs. Getting help to carry heavy shopping bags, hang out washing, do the vacuuming and gardening can mean you can continue to do other activities.

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