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Social Support for Psoriatic Arthritis

Get more information about how getting social support from a formal group or a circle of friends, can help you cope with PsA.

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Medical management is only one part of treating psoriatic arthritis (PsA). Research confirms that the understanding and empathy people with PsA receive from talking to others with the same condition helps them deal with the emotional impact and feel reassured and more connected. Family members and friends can also be important sources of support, whether as outlets for venting on bad days or for help with errands when pain and fatigue get in the way.

PsA and Depression

PsA's toll is more than physical pain and joint damage. It can lead to depression and a lack of social participation in general. A 2014 study in *The Journal of Rheumatology* found up to 22% of people with PsA had depression and 36% lived with anxiety. But research also shows getting emotional support can help protect against emotional distress.

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A 2014 Rehabilitation Psychology study that followed people with inflammatory arthritis found having more support – whether from family and friends or from formal support groups – was associated with less depression. The link was strongest in those whose disease was most disabling. This association works in the opposite direction, as well. Research has found that for people with inflammatory arthritis, having low levels of social support is connected to greater pain and more functional problems.

What Support Does

So how can just talking or spending time with someone help stave off mental and physical distress?

Engaging with supportive people helps improve your outlook and coping skills, something research has linked to less pain and fatigue in inflammatory arthritis, says Anna Chisholm, PhD, a lecturer in health psychology at the University of Liverpool in the UK. Chisholm's research has identified social support as an important, and often unmet, need for people with PsA.

"Finding the right support can help people recognize their patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviors that might be helping or hindering them from coping with the condition or the distress associated with it," she says.

Start with Your Doctor and Close Circle

Your first avenue for finding support should be your rheumatologist or primary care physician, says Chisholm. It's important to let your doctor know if you're struggling emotionally, something her research shows people often skip. It can be hard to ask for help, whether from a loved one or their doctor, because you don't want to feel weak or dependant. Just remember everyone needs support at some point in his or her lives.

It may help to bring a family member or close friend who may not understand your disease to appointments so your doctor can explain psoriatic arthritis. Once they understand that it's a serious condition that can at times be disabling, they may want to be more supportive.

If your doctor is part of large practice, the organization may offer its own support resources, which could

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include groups led by other patients or health professionals. Otherwise he or she can help you identify other organizations that provide these services.

Find Local Support

The Arthritis Foundation connects people around the country with local, in-person groups through Live Yes Connect Groups. The peer-led, local support networks provide their members with opportunities to make connections, be empowered and educated. In addition to local community interaction, there's a national conference called "Annual Gathering" each year that is equal parts educational and social and a JA conference where parents, young adults, kids and teens can connect with other families and hear from leading health experts.

Attending an Arthritis Foundation event, such as Walk to Cure Arthritis is another way to meet others with your condition and learn more about PsA. Want to connect online? Check out the Live Yes Arthritis Network. Visit [arthritis.org](https://www.arthritis.org) for more information about the Foundation's in-person and online resources.

What to Look for In a Support Group

You may have to check out a few groups before finding one that fits your needs and personality. In general, look for those that:

- Focus on PsA or inflammatory arthritis.
- Have an atmosphere in which you feel supported, safe and comfortable.
- Have active members who've been taking part for a while, so you know you're joining a stable group.
- Also have newbies, so you get a range of opinions and perspectives.

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