
Physical disabilities

Summary

- Find information on some physical disabilities commonly found in the community
 - The type of physical disability you have will determine the kind of treatment you need
 - Find organisations that provide information on some physical disabilities
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Making the adjustment to life with limited mobility or motor control can be a difficult process. However, there are many disability support services available to help you maintain your independence and live well in the community.

How serious your physical disability is will determine the kind of treatment you need. Some people may only be required to check in with their doctor or specialist, while others may have to rely on a team of healthcare professionals looking after different areas of their treatment, such as physiotherapists, speech therapists or occupational therapists.

This page lists some of the more common physical disabilities and the issues relating to having a disability. Use the links to find further information on diagnosis, treatment and disability support services.

Amputations and loss of limbs

Losing a limb through accident or disease can be a frightening and challenging experience for amputees and their families. The [Limbs 4 Life website](#) provides information, knowledge and support for amputees and their families across Australia.

Arthritis

There are more than 100 different arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions that affect the muscles, bones and joints. Management techniques can include medical treatment and medication, physiotherapy, exercise and self-management techniques.

For more information see [Arthritis](#).

Arthritis – juvenile

Juvenile arthritis refers to the types of arthritis that affect children. Other names for juvenile arthritis include juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, juvenile chronic arthritis, juvenile idiopathic arthritis and Still's disease. More girls than boys develop juvenile arthritis.

For more information see [Arthritis – juvenile](#).

Rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is a disease in which inflammation (pain, heat and swelling) affects the joints, particularly the hands, feet and knees and sometimes other organs of the body. Joint stiffness is common, especially in the morning. There is no cure for rheumatoid arthritis but there are effective ways to manage it.

For more information see [Rheumatoid arthritis](#).

Reactive arthritis

Reactive arthritis can follow a bacterial infection. The joints of the knees and ankles are most commonly affected. The condition generally resolves by itself over a few months. Unlike other forms of arthritis, reactive arthritis does not destroy the affected joint. Reactive arthritis was formerly known as Reiter's syndrome.

For more information see [Reactive arthritis](#).

Birth defects

A birth defect is an abnormality that may be detected during pregnancy, at birth or in early childhood. The abnormality may affect the function or structure of a body part or alter the baby's metabolism. Some birth defects, such as a particular body part being absent or improperly formed, can require ongoing treatment or therapy.

For more information see: [**Birth defects**](#).

Cerebral palsy

Cerebral palsy describes a range of disabilities associated with movement and posture. A child with cerebral palsy may achieve greater control over movement as they learn and practise motor skills. The condition is not hereditary or contagious.

For more information see [**Cerebral palsy**](#).

Cystic fibrosis

Cystic fibrosis (CF) is a life-threatening genetic disorder. It severely affects the lungs and digestive system. There is currently no cure. However, with improved medication and treatment to manage symptoms, life expectancy has been extended considerably.

For more information see [**Cystic fibrosis**](#).

Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a common neurological condition in which a person has a tendency to have recurring seizures. Treatment may include medication, surgery and lifestyle changes. Medication can successfully control seizures in many people. Surgery may be an option if medication fails to control seizures. Avoiding known triggers and paying attention to lifestyle issues can also help.

For more information see [**Epilepsy**](#).

Neural tube defects

Neural tube defects (NTDs) include spina bifida, anencephaly and encephalocele. Folate deficiency and some epilepsy medications are risk factors for these conditions. Taking folic acid before and during early pregnancy can significantly reduce the risk of neural tube defects. Tests in pregnancy such as ultrasound can diagnose these birth defects.

For more information see [**Neural tube defects**](#).

Spina bifida

Spina bifida is one of a class of birth defects called neural tube defects (NTD). It is an abnormality of the folding of the posterior surface of the embryo, which normally forms the vertebral column with its muscles and the spinal cord and the spinal nerves. The number of babies born with spina bifida in Australia has dropped dramatically in recent years due to greater awareness and intake of folate by women prior to and in the early stages of pregnancy.

For more information see [**Spina bifida**](#).

Maintaining a healthy weight

A person with a disability can avoid becoming overweight or obese with various strategies. People with disabilities may find it hard to maintain a healthy weight. Exercise is difficult for people with limited mobility, but help is available to manage your weight.

For more information see [**Overweight and obesity**](#).

Physical disability and sexuality

Sexuality is a key part of human nature. Expressing sexuality in satisfying ways is important for everyone, including people with physical disability. Some people with physical disability may need additional support, education or services to enjoy healthy sexuality and relationships.

For more information see [**Physical disability and sexuality**](#).

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Maternal and child health service
- Local community health centre
- Your local council
- National Disability Insurance Scheme
- Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria, call (03) 99792 7888
- Scope, call (03) 9843 3000
- Yooralla Community Learning and Living Centre, call (03) 9666 4500 or (03) 9916 5899
- Disability Intake and Response Service, call 1800 008 149

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