

Helping your Child Manage their Symptoms

Living with juvenile arthritis can be painful and frustrating. Encourage your child to express their feelings and emotions, and support them in finding ways to cope. It's also important to not always try to cheer them up. This can make children feel dismissed.



It's important to encourage movement as it can help improve joint mobility, muscle strength, and overall function. Exercise can also help reduce inflammation and fatigue, two common symptoms of arthritis, and promote mental health by reducing stress and anxiety.

- **Talk about movement as movement, not necessarily as exercise.** Doing so can help your child understand that moving in any capacity is good for them, even if it's stretching instead of more intense physical activity.
- **Focus on low-impact exercises** that are gentle on the joints. These include swimming, cycling, yoga, and walking. Make sure to consult with your child's doctor or physical therapist to ensure that the activities are safe and appropriate for them.
- **Adaptive sports and activities** can provide opportunities for children to participate in physical activity, such as basketball or yoga, with any necessary modifications. These programs can improve your child's physical health and provide a valuable social outlet.

Helping your child cope with pain can feel like a tall order. Some things that can help include:

- **Relaxation**—It's important to lower stress where possible, as stress can increase pain levels. Engaging in slow and meaningful breathing, guided meditation, warm baths, and more are all things that may help.
- **Hot and cold**—Not every person tolerates both of these, so work with your child to learn which techniques feel the most comfortable at which times for which sensations. When using anything that is hot or cold, put a barrier between the hot pack and your child's skin. This will protect them from burns or damage. Alternating hot and cold can help ease pain more.
- **Pacing, rest, and energy management**—Help your child learn how to monitor and share about their energy and pain levels. Check in with them regularly during activities, especially if their energy levels have been fluctuating or low. Plan ahead, and talk through how to do tasks when dealing with lower energy or higher pain levels.
- **Dealing with stiffness**—Not all stiffness can be prevented, but encouraging your child to switch positions regularly may help alleviate some stiffness later on.

Set up your kid for success by having a sleep routine. This can include limiting screen use, doing gentle physical therapy exercises, meditation, medication, and story time.

Likewise, try to get moving in the mornings. Your child may have increased stiffness, pain, and fatigue in the morning. Be patient with them and consider asking about pain levels to be aware of how they're feeling. Range-of-motion or physical therapy exercises may help ease stiffness, as can a warm shower or heating pads.

Setting digital alarms can help everyone know when medication needs to be taken or when at-home therapy exercises should be done. You can also keep a chart or a calendar out in the open to help your child keep track of what they need to do on a daily and weekly basis.

Plan for flare-ups that are predictable when possible. For some people with arthritis, the time of year or some types of weather may increase symptoms and discomfort. Some helpful items to have on hand might include electrolyte drinks, easy-to-open snacks, protein, and extra pain management-related items.

Traveling can be really fun! To keep it as fun as possible, consider the following:

- **If you're driving somewhere**, plan rest stops frequently to allow your child to move
- **If flying**, learn what requirements may exist around traveling with medications. If you're flying with a biologic, for example, you will need to have a still-frozen ice pack with you when you arrive to the TSA security line. If you're traveling to other countries, there may be additional requirements.
- **If you're visiting your favorite theme park**, it's tempting to want to try to do everything in one day. With pain, stiffness, fatigue, and other factors, your child may not be able to do that, though. Plan rest breaks and downtime—and don't forget to check in with your child throughout the day.
- **Be open to changing up plans** based on pain or energy levels. Bring snacks that your child can and will eat.
- **Bring medical supplies** with you and have them readily available on-hand.