

Self-Management Programs

for osteoarthritis (OA)

What are self-management programs

Self-management programs help people with osteoarthritis (OA) take an active role in managing their symptoms. They are used together with your regular medical care.

- Understanding OA and treatment options
- Staying active and protecting joints
- Managing pain, stress, and fatigue
- Setting goals and solving problems
- Tracking symptoms and knowing when to seek care
- Getting support from others

Do they work?

- May help improve pain, physical function and self-management skills
- Benefits are usually small
- Safe and unlikely to cause harm

How certain is the evidence?

- Evidence is moderate to low certainty
- Studies show mixed results
- Many studies included similar types of participants
- More research is needed

Self-management programs are not a replacement for medications or medical care. They work best combined with your usual treatment.

Who might benefit most?

Programs may work better when tailored to your needs.

- Cost or access to programs
- Language or understanding health information
- Culture or personal beliefs
- Where you live (e.g., rural or remote areas)
- Daily responsibilities (work, caregiving)

How can you make it work for you?

- Choose programs that fit your life (in-person, online, or by phone)
- Look for free or low-cost options
- Ask for clear explanations
- Bring a family member or friend for support
- Start small with one or two changes
- Set realistic goals
- Go at your own pace
- Adjust activities based on pain or fatigue

What we don't know yet

- Who benefits the most
- How to improve access for everyone
- Whether programs reduce health differences between groups

Bottom line

Self-management programs for OA can help you manage your symptoms and improve daily life. They work best when tailored to your needs and used alongside your regular care.