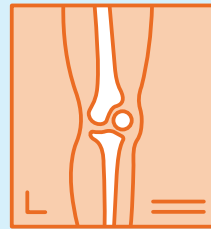# Don't get bent out of shape!

If you have ever had back, joint, or muscle pain, you know it can seriously impact your quality of life.

Understanding the basics of musculoskeletal health can help you prevent and treat injury so you can get back to doing the things you love.

What are musculosketal conditions?

Musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions can cause pain that affects your bones, connective tissues, and muscles. Individuals who have MSK conditions may experience pain and discomfort, stiffness, sleep disruptions, and mental health problems.

Most MSK injuries are the result of a strain or sprain caused by exerting too much force too quickly or exerting too much force over an extended period.

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SYMPTOMS

MSK condition symptoms can vary depending on the severity of injury.

Common symptoms of injury include:

- Bone, joint, muscle, and/or tendon and ligament pain
- Recurrent pain or discomfort
- Stiff joints
- Swelling

These symptoms can affect any area of your musculoskeletal system, including your back, neck, wrists, feet, knees, legs, hips, wrists, and more.
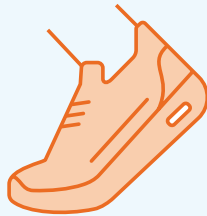
TREATMENT

For serious injuries and complex causes of MSK pain, it is important to see your primary care doctor or specialist.

Your doctor or specialist may recommend:

- Follow up care with an orthopedic doctor, physiatrist, or physical and/or occupational therapist
- Tests such as an X-ray or MRI
- Medications
- Surgery

For mild pain, at home treatment can help. This includes rest, over-the-counter medications, hot and cold therapy, and stretching exercises. Without proper treatment, moderate injuries can lead to chronic pain and mobility issues.

PREVENTING INJURY

Preventing MSK injuries includes a mix of healthy habits, proper body mechanics and ergonomic tools.

- **Don't skip warm-ups and stretching:** Before you start an activity, warm up with dynamic stretching. Dynamic stretching mimics the movement of the activity you're about to start and gets your muscles ready for movement. After your activity, make sure to static stretch. Static stretching is when you get into a stretch position and hold it for a specific amount of time, improving flexibility and range of motion.
- **Prioritize strength training as you age:** Strength training can build and maintain muscle mass which will stabilize your bones, joints, and spine. It can also play a role in slowing bone loss, decreasing the risk of injury. Additionally, core strengthening and balance exercises will improve stability, allowing for increased mobility.
- **Practice mindful movement and ergonomics:** Pay close attention to how you move during daily activities. Whether you are reaching, bending, or twisting, move with intention to avoid straining muscles and joints.
- **Practice good posture:** Having good posture can help you avoid common aches and pains in your back, neck, and shoulders. Maintaining healthy posture can reduce wear and tear on your joints, especially in your neck and spine.
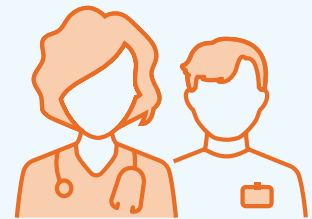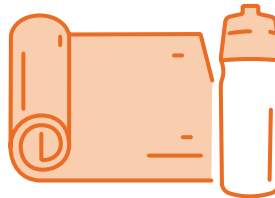
WHEN YOU SHOULD SEEK CARE

If you have back, joint, or muscle pain that:

- Is associated with unexplained weight loss, a fever over 102°F, loss of bladder or bowel control, loss of strength or numbness
- Is persistent or lasts longer than four weeks
- Is not relieved by position/posture or is getting worse over time

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