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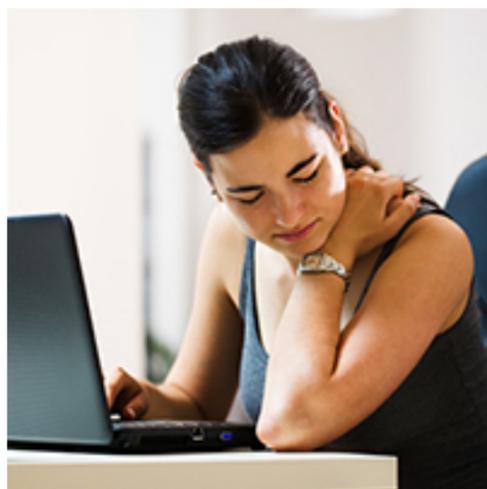
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## When Sitting Hurts: Tips to Relieve Psoriatic Arthritis Pain

By Krisha McCoy

Reviewed by Farrokh Sohrabi, MD

**After sitting for long periods of time, psoriatic arthritis can cause pain and stiffness in your joints. Get psoriatic arthritis management strategies for easing the agony.**



Stiffness is one of the hallmark symptoms of PsA.

Sitting can be a real pain with psoriatic arthritis. Amanda Steyer knows this all too well.

“One of the pieces of advice I get from people in my life who don’t have psoriatic arthritis is that I should sit down and rest more, maybe spend a day or two in bed until I feel better,” says Steyer, a mother of five who lives in Bristol, Conn.

She was diagnosed with psoriatic arthritis (PsA) two years ago, but says she's had symptoms since she was 4 years old but was always told they were just growing pains. “What these well-meaning people don’t understand is that sitting for long periods — or sometimes even short periods — can lead to more pain and stiffness.”

### Why Prolonged Sitting Is a Problem With PsA

“When I sit for long periods, it’s as if my body seizes up,” Steyer says. “My joints get stiffer and more painful the longer I sit.”

She's not alone. One of the hallmark symptoms of psoriatic arthritis is increased stiffness after a night’s sleep or a prolonged period of rest.

“Shifting position can help a bit, but eventually there is no comfortable position in which to sit,” she says. “My legs will start to ache, and then that pain turns into worsening joint pain in the hips, knees, ankles, and lower back.”

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Just recently, Steyer drove home from vacation with her family, a drive that took much longer than the expected four hours. “Even though we stopped several times along the way so I could get out of the van and move around, I arrived home in significant pain,” she says. “It’s now two days later, and my body is just starting to get back to normal.”

## How to Relieve Pain From Sitting

Steyer says she has to find a balance between movement and rest as part of her psoriatic arthritis management. “Sitting for long periods of time can have just as great a negative effect on my body as physically overdoing it,” she says.

If you must sit in one position for long stretches of time, there are psoriatic arthritis management steps that can help.

“I like to use what I call the 30/30 rule,” says Marvin Smith, DPT, PT, a certified strength and conditioning specialist and a physical therapist at Oregon Health & Science University. If you're in one position for 30 minutes, change your spine and hip position for 30 seconds into the opposite direction. If you're sitting in a slouched position, stand up as tall as you can or arch your back and straighten out your knees for 30 seconds every 30 minutes.

Marianne Ryan, PT, BS, OCS, a physical therapist and owner/director of MRPT Physical Therapy in New York and an American Physical Therapy Association spokeswoman, also recommends plenty of movement in people with psoriatic arthritis. “Movement will bring more fluid to the joint,” she says. “Get up every hour on the hour.”

Ryan recommends that people with psoriatic arthritis use a supportive chair, along with cushions underneath the buttocks and in the lumbar area. “As you sit, gravity is pushing down on the body,” she says. “A layer of cushioning will kind of soften the blow.”

She also says to stand whenever you can. For instance, if you're on a long phone call, use headsets or a speakerphone, and get up and walk around.

## Stretches and Movements for PsA

“On days when I find myself exhausted and not wanting to move much,” Steyer says, “I do my best to get up and move every once in awhile.” If she's reading a book or helping one of her kids with a project, she makes sure to get up and move around at regular intervals. “I’ll get up and put dishes in the dishwasher, get another load of laundry going, or just stretch,” she says.

If you have to sit for hours at a time, Ryan recommends the following exercises to reduce pain and stiffness in your joints:

- **Head Rotations.** Move your head left and then right, which can help prevent stiffness in your spine.
- **Chin Tucks.** While sitting upright and keeping your chest still, glide your chin toward the base of your neck without moving your head forward.
- **Shoulder Rolls.** Keeping your chest still and arms by your side, roll your shoulders up, then back, and then down.
- **Pelvic Circles.** While standing, move your pelvis around to the right and then around to the left.
- **Back Extensions.** Place both of your hands on your lower back while standing, and then arch backwards so that you feel an extension in the spine.

These exercises can help you manage your psoriatic arthritis pain and stiffness. Ryan recommends doing one to two sets of 10 to 15 repetitions of each of the above exercises during regular breaks throughout the day. “Do more if it feels good,” she says, adding that you should do the exercises in pain-free ranges, which means pushing the movement only as far as you can without feeling any pain.

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