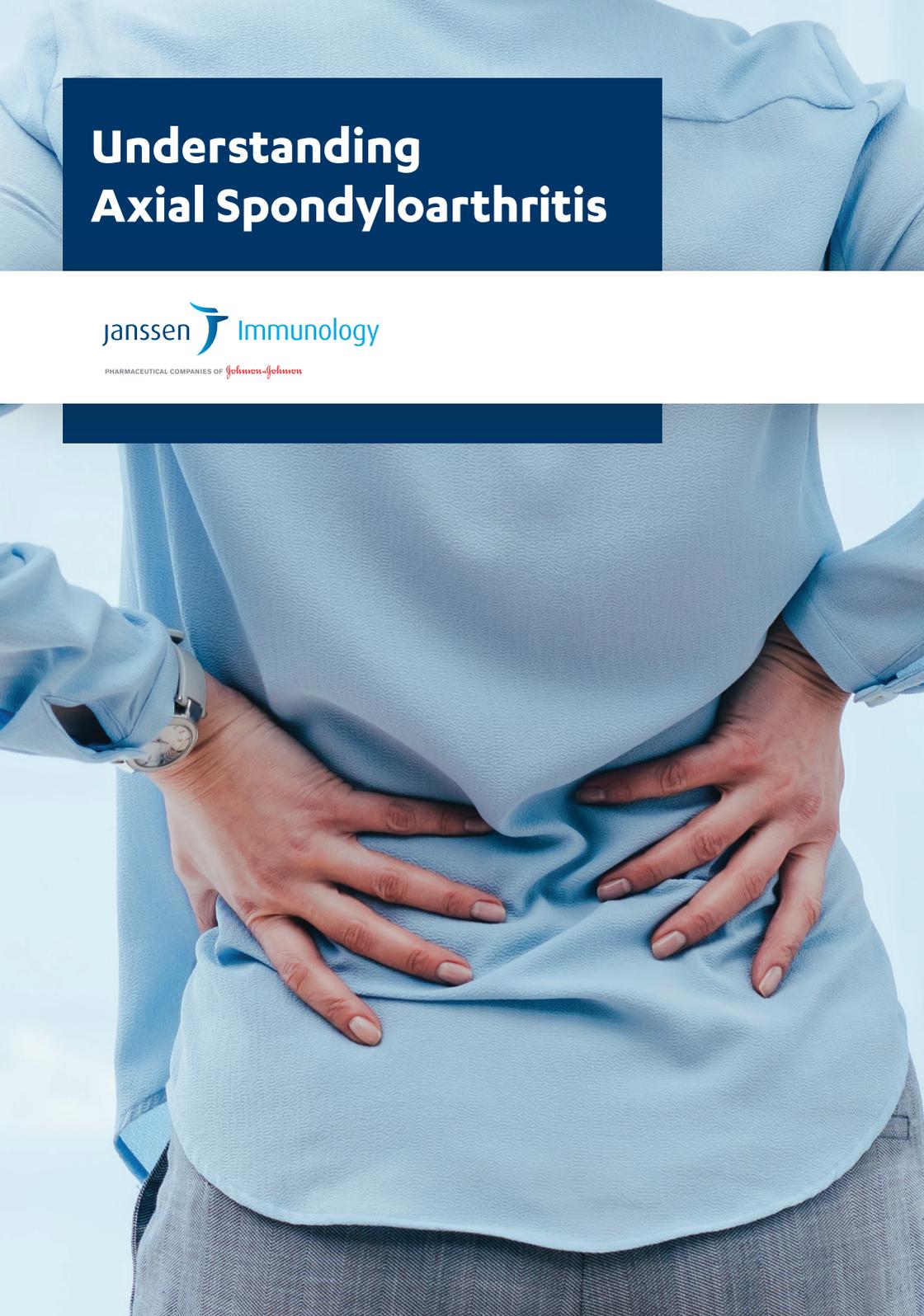


Understanding Axial Spondyloarthritis

janssen  Immunology

PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES OF 



What is axial spondyloarthritis?

Axial spondyloarthritis (axSpA) is a type of inflammatory arthritis that mainly affects the spine and pelvic joints. It is an umbrella term which includes:



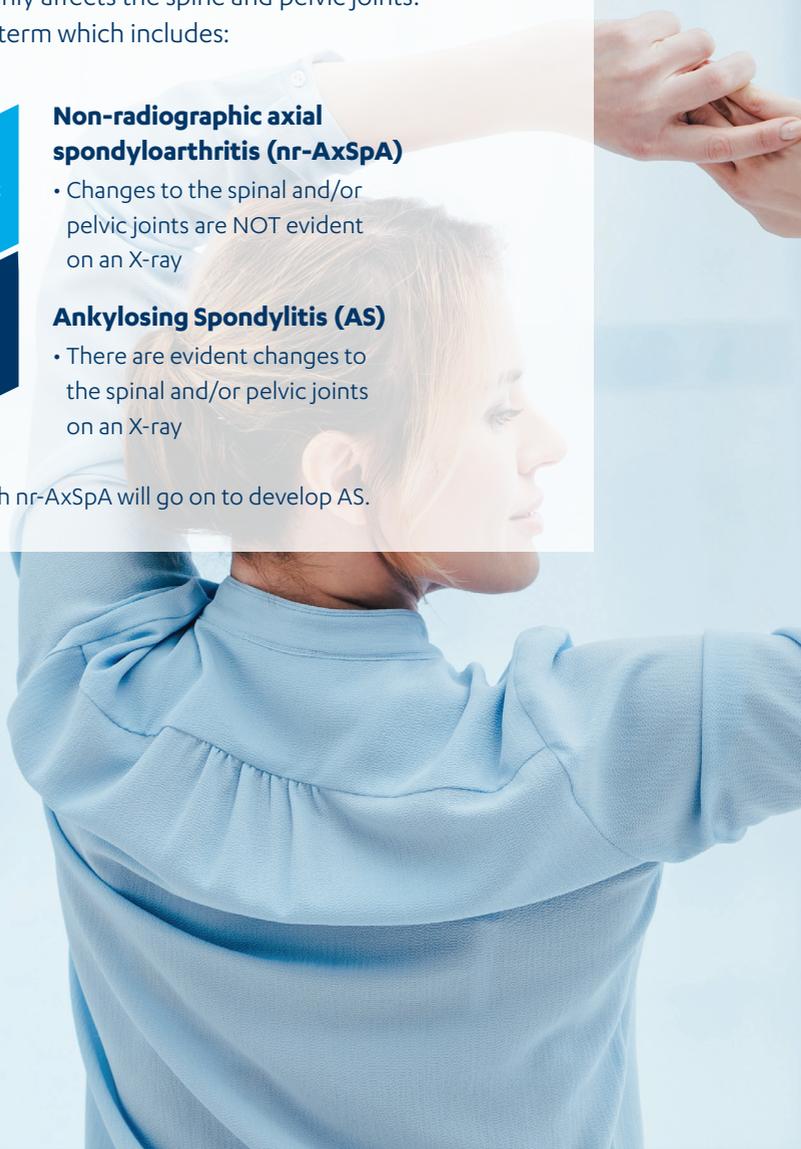
Non-radiographic axial spondyloarthritis (nr-AxSpA)

- Changes to the spinal and/or pelvic joints are NOT evident on an X-ray

Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS)

- There are evident changes to the spinal and/or pelvic joints on an X-ray

Not all people with nr-AxSpA will go on to develop AS.

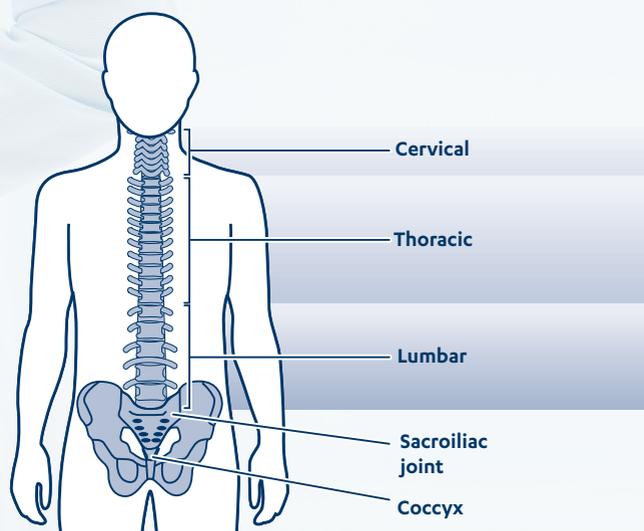


What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of axSpA vary from person to person, but usually appear slowly – over weeks or months – rather than hours or days. Generally, people experience persistent symptoms for more than three months, usually improving after exercise and worsening after rest. Typical symptoms include:

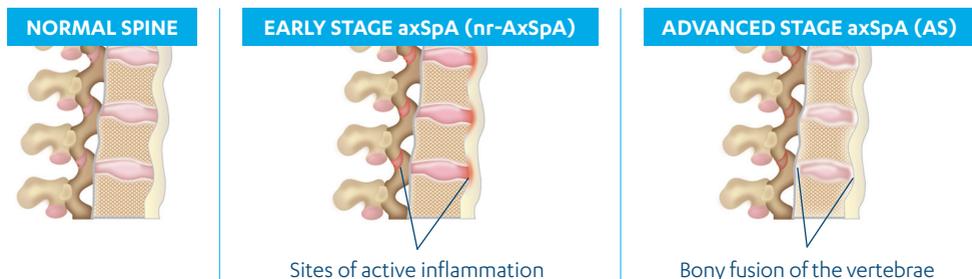
- Inflammation of the sacroiliac joints (the joints of the lower back where the spine connects to the pelvis), which can cause a dull ache deep in the buttock area
- Gradual onset of back pain and stiffness
- Early morning stiffness and pain, which improves with exercise or a warm shower

Having axSpA can limit how a person moves, how they feel and their ability to accomplish everyday activities, particularly if non-radiographic axial spondyloarthritis (nr-AxSpA) has progressed to the more advanced stage of AS.



What causes axial spondyloarthritis?

Axial spondyloarthritis (axSpA) is known as an inflammatory disorder or autoimmune disease. It is thought to occur when the body's immune system becomes overactive and attacks the body's own tissues. Normally, the immune system protects the body from invasion by germs and also repairs damage. However, when someone has axSpA, their immune system causes inflammation in the joints. The exact causes of this defect in the immune system are not known for sure, but scientists believe that genetics play a role.¹ It is known that most people with axSpA carry a gene called *HLA-B27*.¹ However, other factors are likely to be involved, as not all people with the *HLA-B27* gene develop axSpA.¹



In axSpA, certain ligaments (which connect bone to bone) or tendons (which attach muscle to bone) become inflamed at the site where they attach to the bone. This inflammation leads to the bones being worn down, which the body then tries to mend by producing new bone. This new bone replaces the elastic tissue of the ligaments and tendons, potentially restricting movement and causing pain. Over time, this repeated process leads to further bone formation and the individual bones that make up the spine (vertebrae) can fuse together. This advanced stage is called Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS). Around half of people with nr-AxSpA will go on to develop AS, usually over a period of around 10 years.¹

Important facts

- The incidence of nr-AxSpA is almost equivalent between men and women;¹ however, AS is three times more likely in men²



- AxSpA usually first appears between the ages of 15–40 years old²
- For many people, the symptoms may come and go over many years
- Nr-AxSpA often goes undiagnosed because there are no evident changes on an X-ray, so it can be mistaken for ordinary back pain
- Around half of people with nr-AxSpA go on to develop AS, usually over the period of a decade³
- The term Ankylosing Spondylitis is derived from the Greek language, with ‘ankylosing’ meaning joining together, while ‘spondylitis’ means inflammation of the spine
- Fatigue is a common symptom of axSpA
- AxSpA is often associated with systemic inflammation, which can involve the eyes, skin and gut. However, uveitis is more common for people with AS⁴
- There is currently no cure for axSpA, although medication, maintaining good posture, exercise, and in advanced cases of AS, surgery may be recommended

Helpful contacts

Local resources

If you are living with an inflammatory joint disease, there are many organisations you can call upon. Some offer information and advice; others provide counselling or advocacy. Many have local branches so that you can access resources and support networks near you.



Arthritis Australia

www.arthritisaustralia.com.au

Freecall: 1800 011 041

Empowered – Arthritis Australia

www.empowered.org.au



Health Direct Australia

www.healthdirect.gov.au

International resources

Many international organisations also offer useful resources and information, but please remember that some treatments, advice and services offered overseas may not be relevant in Australia.



Creaky Joints

www.creakyjoints.org



Dragon Claw

www.dragonclaw.net

References: **1.** National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society (NASS). 2015. Guidebook for Patients. Available at: <https://nass.co.uk/nass/en/healthcare-professionals/resources-for-health-professionals/patient-information-resources/> (accessed 22/8/18). **2.** Arthritis Australia. 2015. Taking control of your Ankylosing Spondylitis. Available at: <http://arthritistas.org.au/wpcontent/uploads/2015/06/Taking-control-of-your-Ankylosing-Spondylitis-booklet.pdf> (accessed 22/8/18). **3.** Brown M & Bradbury LA, *Med J Aust* 2017; 206(5):192–194. **4.** Ghosh N & Ruderman EM, *Arth Res Ther* 2017;19:286.