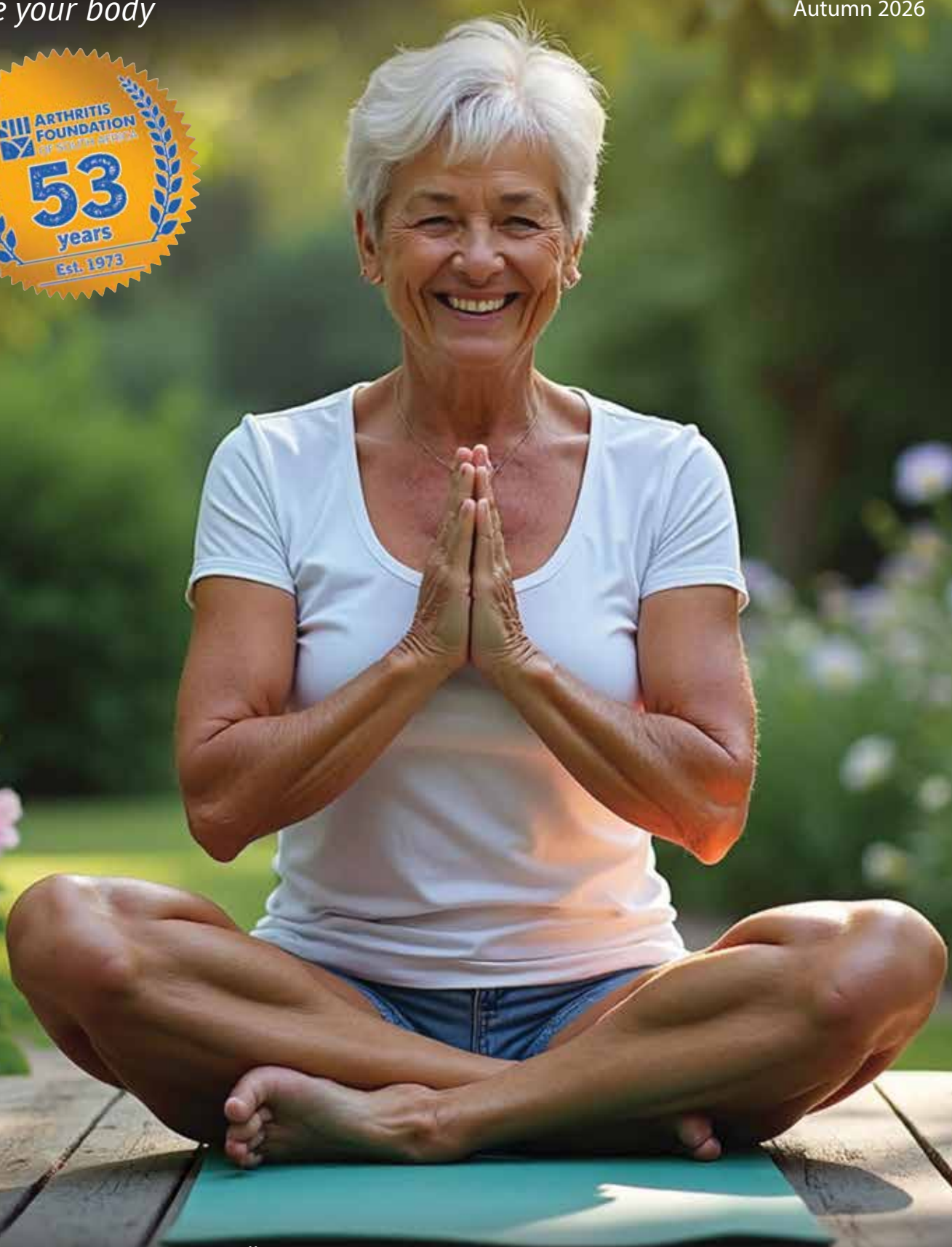




p6/ Integrative wellness
coach's stories of real
change in clients

p4/ Getting moving
again after a setback



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The Arthritis Foundation is a patient-oriented, non-profit organisation dedicated to education, assistance, and informing the public about the impact and consequences of arthritis. We work to empower those with arthritis to take charge of their condition through advocacy, education, support, and access to information and resources.

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Please note: Authors' opinions in articles are not necessarily recommended or endorsed by The Arthritis Foundation of SA. Neither are advertised products nor services recommended by The Arthritis Foundation of SA. Please exercise discretion and consult with your treating doctor or rheumatologist before trying new products or therapies.

A season for resilience

Welcome to the May 2026 edition of Arthritis Insight.

As Summer draws to a close and the weather gets cooler we generally feel that things are slowing down. There are various reasons for people living with arthritis to feel that they're affected by the seasons and the weather.

For some there is an increase in stiffness and discomfort in their bodies and joints. For them winter can be a challenging time, both physically and emotionally. For all of us it is also an opportunity to refocus on what supports our health, our resilience, and our sense of connection.

This issue is focused on one of the most powerful tools available to us: movement. Movement is essential for body and mind and it can take many forms. It can be intense which releases a lot of hormones in the body, but it doesn't need to be. For people living with arthritis, is gentle, consistent, and meaningful movement that supports both body and mind. Research and lived experience reminds us that staying active is one of the most effective ways to manage arthritis, reduce pain, and improve quality of life.

However, we also recognise that movement is not always easy. Fear of pain, past setbacks, or periods of illness can make restarting feel overwhelming. On pages 3 and 4, we explore these very real barriers. You will find practical guidance on overcoming the fear of movement, rebuilding confidence after a setback, and approaching exercise with compassion rather than pressure.

We also highlight the importance of a balanced approach to physical activity. Whether it is aerobic exercise to support heart



health, strength training to protect joints, or flexibility work to reduce stiffness, page 7 details how each plays a vital role. Encouragingly, these do not require expensive equipment or gym memberships. As the personal account on page 10 shows, meaningful change can begin at home, even from a chair.

Beyond movement, this issue reflects our broader commitment to holistic care. Living well with arthritis is not just about managing symptoms, but about supporting the whole person. This includes mental wellbeing, social connection, and access to accurate, empowering information.

Our page 5 feature on NSAIDs provides a balanced view of a commonly used treatment, helping you to better understand both the benefits and risks. Page 8 explores the value of a multidisciplinary approach, where health-care professionals work together to support your journey in a coordinated and effective way.

You will also find inspiring personal stories in these

pages. From individuals rebuilding their strength after setbacks on page 6, to young Emily-Ann's courageous journey with a rare autoimmune condition on pages 13 and 14, these stories remind us of the resilience of the human spirit. They reflect the reality that while arthritis may be part of your life, it does not define it.

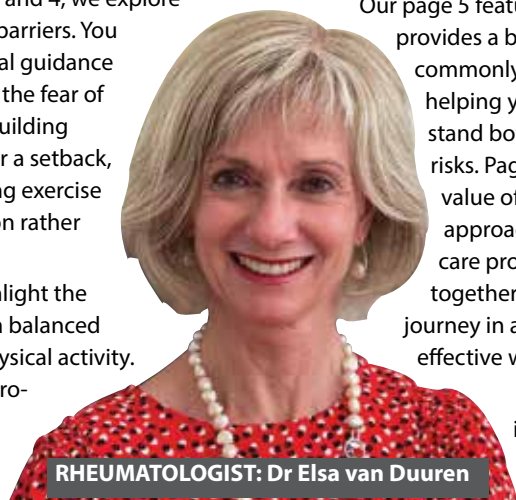
At the Arthritis Foundation of South Africa, our mission remains clear: to educate, support, and empower. We are committed to ensuring that no one faces arthritis alone. Through our outreach programmes, resources, and community initiatives on pages 16 to 18, we continue to work toward improving the lives of those affected by this condition.

As always, I encourage you to listen to your body, work closely with your health-care providers, and take small, consistent steps toward your wellbeing. Progress is rarely linear, but every effort counts.

Thank you for being part of our community. Your strength, perseverance, and willingness to keep moving forward are what inspire the work that we do.

Wishing you warmth, strength, and resilience as winter approaches.

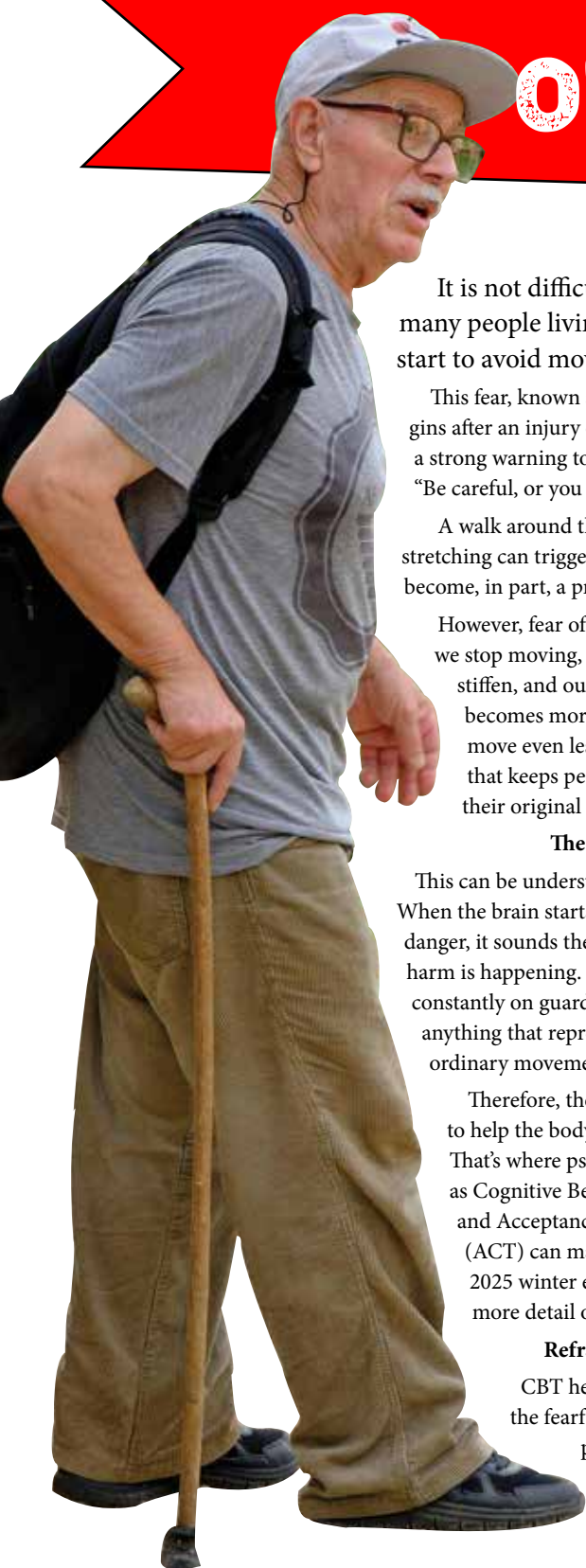
*Happy reading,
Dr Elsa van Duuren*



RHEUMATOLOGIST: Dr Elsa van Duuren

Overcoming the Fear of Pain

and getting your body moving again



It is not difficult to understand why many people living with chronic pain start to avoid movement altogether.

This fear, known as kinesiophobia, often begins after an injury or flare-up, when pain sends a strong warning to the brain, something like: "Be careful, or you might hurt yourself again."

A walk around the block, bending or even stretching can trigger the anxiety that has become, in part, a protective habit.

However, fear of pain can backfire. When we stop moving, muscles weaken, joints stiffen, and our confidence fades. The body becomes more sensitive to pain, and we move even less. It's a vicious cycle, one that keeps people stuck, even long after their original injury has healed.

The Pain-Fear Loop

This can be understood as a pain-fear loop. When the brain starts linking movement with danger, it sounds the alarm even when no real harm is happening. The nervous system remains constantly on guard, on the look out for anything that represents pain, which can make ordinary movements feel threatening.

Therefore, the goal isn't to ignore pain but to help the body and brain feel safe again. That's where psychological approaches such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) can make a difference. See the 2025 winter edition of *Arthritis Insight* for more detail on these approaches.

Reframing Fear with CBT

CBT helps us notice and question the fearful thoughts that accompany pain. These can be thoughts like "If I move, I'll cause more damage". These thoughts feel convincing,

By **ROBERT JEAN-JACQUES**,
Registered Counsellor

but often they're based on old experiences rather than current reality.

By gently testing them you can begin to train your brain to replace fear with confidence. Start small and move gradually. For instance, try walking for a few minutes, then stretch your shoulders, and make it a point to notice that your body can, in fact, move safely. Each success builds reassurance and re-trains the brain to calm the alarm. Of course, check first with your healthcare provider around the types of movement that are recommended.

Taking action with ACT

ACT takes a slightly different approach. Instead of fighting pain or fear, it teaches acceptance, or allowing discomfort to exist without letting it run your life. You are encouraged to focus on what's meaningful to you, whether that be gardening or walking with a friend.

The question posed by ACT is: "How can I move toward what matters to me, even if some pain is present?" By taking small steps that align with your values, your life begins to expand again.

Rebuilding Trust in Your Body

Simple, mindful activities like stretching, yoga, or tai chi help rebuild trust in the body. Breathing slowly, paying attention to sensations, and noticing that you are safe sends calming signals to the nervous system. Movement becomes less about avoiding pain and more about reconnecting with your body.

Overcoming fear of movement is certainly not about pushing through pain or proving toughness. It's about restoring confidence, curiosity, and kindness toward your body. By blending gentle activity with CBT and ACT strategies, you can quiet the fear, retrain the brain, and rediscover the benefits of movement.

Ref: www.arthritis.org.za



Movement Mojo



Getting going with exercise after experiencing a setback

When pain, injury, or illness forces you to take a break from physical activity, starting again can feel like being at the foot of a high mountain.

Taking that first step can feel like an insurmountable task. For many people living with arthritis or chronic pain, this emotional hurdle can become the biggest barrier to moving forward.

Yet movement remains one of the most powerful tools for improving body and mind. Therefore, the key is not in pushing harder, but in understanding the psychology of motivation, and learning to approach movement with compassion.

After a flare-up or period of inactivity, it's common to think, "What's the point? I've lost all my progress." This kind of all-or-nothing thinking can quickly drain motivation. Truth is, recovery is not linear. There will be good days and bad days, and that's normal.

Psychologists see this mindset as a tendency to measure success only by achievement, rather than effort. Instead, try shifting your focus from performance to participation. Each small action, even

By **ROBERT JEAN-JACQUES**,
Registered Counsellor

standing up, stretching, or taking a short walk, is a meaningful step toward getting your movement mojo back.

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion means treating yourself with the same kindness you'd offer a friend who's struggling. Research shows that people who practise self-compassion are more likely to stick with positive health behaviours, because they bounce back faster after setbacks.

When pain or fatigue flares up, try saying to yourself: "This is hard right now, but I'm doing my best." This small shift reduces shame and self-judgment, two powerful motivation killers, and allows you to start again without guilt.

Setting Goals

Many of us set goals that are too ambitious, leading to burnout or discouragement. A better approach is to use SMART goals, standing for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based.

For example: "I'll walk for a manageable 10 minutes, timed on my watch, and

gently stretching my hips, for three times this week."

Small, realistic goals create momentum. Each success encourages doing the positive behaviour again. Over time, these small wins rebuild confidence.

Connecting to Meaning

Furthermore, motivation grows stronger when it's connected to your values. Ask yourself: Why do I want to move more? Perhaps it's to stay active with your grandchildren, travel comfortably, or stay independent. When movement is linked to something personal, it becomes more than exercise, it transforms a 'task' into a way of living with purpose.

Start slowly

Begin slowly, listen to your body, and celebrate each milestone. Flare-ups or fatigue don't mean failure; they're simply feedback. Adjust, rest, and return when ready. The goal isn't perfection, it's sustainability.

Movement, when paired with compassion, becomes a form of self-respect. Every stretch, every step, every breath reminds you that your body is resilient, and worthy of care.



Weighing the PROS and CONS of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs



For many people living with arthritis, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are a familiar part of daily life.

These medications are widely used to reduce pain and inflammation, two of the most challenging symptoms of arthritis.

While NSAIDs can be highly effective, they also carry potential risks. Understanding both sides helps people with arthritis make informed decisions about treatment. Here we look at the pros and cons.

One of the main advantages of NSAIDs is that they reduce inflammation. Unlike simple painkillers that only block pain signals, NSAIDs target the inflammatory process itself.

Because inflammation plays a central role in many forms of arthritis, NSAIDs can significantly ease swelling and stiffness.

By ARTHRITIS INSIGHT REPORTER

Many people find that NSAIDs improve mobility. Regular movement, in turn, supports joint health and overall wellbeing.

Another benefit is accessibility. Some NSAIDs are available over the counter, making short-term relief affordable. They are also available in different forms, including tablets and topical gels. Topical preparations applied directly to the affected joint may provide relief with fewer side-effects, which can be especially helpful for older adults.

However, NSAIDs have drawbacks. These medications can irritate the stomach lining, potentially leading to heartburn or ulcers. The risk increases with long-term use, higher doses and advancing age. Doctors advise taking NSAIDs with food and using the lowest effective dose.

There are other risks to consider. NSAIDs may affect kidney function and can raise blood pressure, which is why doctors caution people with existing cardiovascular or renal conditions around using them. Some studies have also linked certain NSAIDs to an increased risk of heart attack, stroke, or arrhythmias, especially when used in high doses over extended periods.

The key to safe use lies in careful management. NSAIDs are often most beneficial when used for short periods during flare-ups, rather than all the time. Regular check-ups with a healthcare provider can help monitor overall safety.

NSAIDs remain a tool for managing pain and maintaining quality of life. By balancing benefits against potential risks and using them thoughtfully, with monitoring, people can make informed choices.

Tailored Wellness

An integrative wellness coach relates inspiring stories of clients' real change

By **HAYLEY ALEXANDER, Integrative Wellness Coach and Yoga Educator**

When clients begin their wellness journey with me, they often come with curiosity rather than certainty. They feel that something isn't aligning and want a personalised understanding of what their body needs, rather than another generic set of instructions.

True wellness begins with getting to know the person in the room, not just their symptoms. Once we understand your story and your biology, we can begin shaping a targeted, meaningful plan.

Mo's Story: Rebuilding Strength After Pain

Mo came to me after foot surgery left him with nerve damage and recurring gout flare-ups. The pain restricted his movement and slowly eroded his confidence. He felt stuck and unsure of how to rebuild his well-being.

"About a year ago, Hayley began supporting me by delving into my personal DNA," he said. "We built a journey of goal-setting and habits that made me feel lighter and more confident."

Our work centred on reducing inflammation, reintroducing gentle strength exercises, and supporting his nervous system so he could move without fear.

Kelsy's Story: Finding Balance in a Demanding Life

Kelsy, a 35-year-old CEO and single mother, lived with chronic fatigue despite her best efforts to train and eat well. Her demanding schedule left little room for herself, and she struggled to understand why nothing seemed to shift her energy.

After an honest conversation about her stress load and lifestyle patterns, we created a realistic plan that blended short but effective workouts, targeted nutrition, nervous system support, and habits she could actually maintain.

Gina and Gareth: A Remote Journey with Life-Changing Results

While holidaying in South Africa, Gareth and Gina joined a health retreat where I was a facilitator. They attended my DNA wellness talk. Gina, who had been struggling with chronic back pain, fatigue, and inflammation, felt particularly drawn to the idea of personalised health.

They completed their DNA tests. "The report was wonderful, but going through it with Hayley was the best part," they said. "It reduced our worrying by more than 90 percent."

Gina began walking daily and practising yoga. Combined with targeted nutrition and gradual weight-loss, her back pain significantly eased. Gareth streamlined his supplement routine and noticed improved energy.

Their story shows how precise guidance can unlock change that once felt out of reach.

What to expect when you work with a coach

Every client journey is unique, but the framework is consistent and supportive.

1. We Begin With You

A discovery consultation to understand your lifestyle, habits, symptoms, stress-load and personal health story.

2. DNA Testing for Personal Insight

The test identifies how your body metabolises nutrients, manages inflammation, regulates weight, responds to hormones, and which lifestyle habits support your biology.

3. Tailored Nutrition and Lifestyle Planning

Your results guide a targeted, personalised plan aligned with your goals and biology.

4. Mind-Body Integration

Movement, yoga, breathwork, stretching, and nervous system support meet mindset and behavioural coaching.

5. Ongoing Support

Regular check-ins and access to online courses ensure you receive ongoing support throughout your journey.



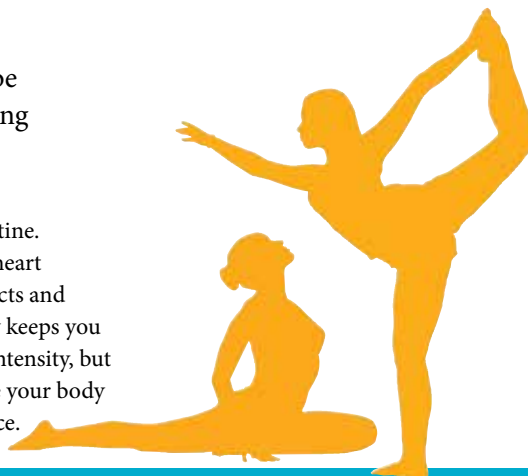
WELLNESS PRO: Hayley Alexander
www.mindbodyevolve.co.za

Three essential ways to keep joints moving

When it comes to managing arthritis, exercise does not need to be complicated. In fact, focusing on just three key categories, these being aerobic, strength, and flexibility, can provide a simple and effective foundation for better health, mobility, and overall wellbeing.

Together, these three categories form the foundation of a balanced exercise routine.

Aerobic movement supports your heart and energy, strength training protects and stabilises your joints, and flexibility keeps you moving with ease. The goal is not intensity, but consistency—finding ways to move your body regularly, safely, and with confidence.



Flexibility

Flexibility exercises improve the range of motion in your joints and the length of your muscles. Gentle stretching, yoga, or simple range-of-motion movements can help reduce stiffness and keep the body moving. These exercises are particularly helpful after periods of rest, such as first thing in the morning, when joints often feel tight. Moving slowly and breathing deeply during stretching can also promote relaxation and reduce tension in the body.



Strength

Strength training builds and maintains muscle by working against resistance. This can include using resistance bands, light weights, or simple bodyweight movements like standing up from a chair or doing wall push-ups. Strong muscles play a vital role in protecting your joints. They act as shock absorbers, reducing strain and improving stability. This can help make everyday activities, such as climbing stairs or carrying groceries, feel more manageable. The key is to start gently and progress gradually, always working within a comfortable range.



Aerobic

Aerobic exercise, often referred to as cardio, involves continuous movement that gently raises your heart rate and breathing. Activities such as walking, swimming, or cycling are excellent examples. This type of exercise supports heart and lung health, improves circulation, and helps boost energy levels and mood. For people living with arthritis, low-impact options are especially important, as they reduce stress on the joints.





By ARTHRITIS INSIGHT REPORTER

When you live with arthritis, you'll come into contact with various professionals, including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and biokineticists.

They all work with movement, so it's easy to feel confused about who does what. Here's the differences and similarities.

Physiotherapy: Managing Pain and Restoring Movement

Physiotherapists (or physios) focus on how your body moves as a whole, focusing on joints, muscles and nerves. Their main aim is to restore and maintain your physical function and mobility.

Physios help you to: reduce pain and swelling; improve range of motion; strengthen muscles; work on balance, gait, and posture; and last but not least, recover after surgery (like a joint replacement).

They use tools like manual therapy (hands-on techniques), therapeutic exercises, taping, dry needling, and modalities such as heat, ice, or electrotherapy.

Occupational Therapy: Making Everyday Life Easier

Occupational therapists (OTs) focus on helping you do the activities that matter to you. These include self-care (dressing, bathing), work, hobbies, and roles at home.

An OT may help you to: adapt how you perform daily tasks to reduce joint strain; use assistive devices (jar openers, tap turners, button hooks); learn joint protection; modify your environment for safety and



ease; and support emotional adjustment to living with a chronic condition.

In short, physios often work on how the body moves, while OT works on how you live with the body you have.

Biokinetics: Exercise as Medicine

Biokineticists are exercise specialists who use physical activity to prevent and manage chronic conditions. They focus on long-term exercise programmes that improve strength, fitness, and quality of life.

A biokineticist may: design a personalised exercise plan; help you train safely around painful or damaged joints; support weight management and general health through movement.

Whereas physios often help you through the more acute or painful phases, biokineticists usually guide you in ongoing exercise once you're more stable.

Multidisciplinary Collaboration: Your Health Team

The best outcomes happen when these professionals collaborate. For instance, a physio might first reduce your pain and improve mobility. Then an OT helps you apply those gains to daily life, work, and hobbies. A biokineticist then builds on this foundation with a sustainable exercise programme.

Together they form a multidisciplinary team that supports you. Good communication between professionals means your goals are clear and your care is holistic.

This is why it is important to keep everyone on the same page. Considering that all health conditions are protected by privacy laws, you may have to sign a limited release of confidential information to enable clear pathways of communication.

Movement medicine

Key principles from a personal trainer working with people with arthritis

1 Start where their joints are today, not where they "used to be."

Many clients feel frustrated about lost strength or mobility. Acknowledge that grief, then shift the focus to what is possible right now. Begin with small, achievable movements and gradually build up. Success early on is crucial for motivation.

2 Prioritise low-impact, joint-friendly movement.

Focus on activities like walking on even surfaces, stationary cycling or water aerobics. These allow the joints to move without heavy impact. For strength, use resistance bands, light weights, or bodyweight exercises done with control.

3 That warm-up before is a non-negotiable.

Stiff joints do not like being rushed. Start with five to 10 minutes of gentle range-of-motion moves: shoulder circles, ankle rolls, hip swings, and slow marching on the spot. This increases blood-flow and lubricates the joints, often reducing discomfort once the session gets going.

4 Strength training protects your joints.

Strong muscles act like shock absorbers. Focus on strengthening muscles around the affected joints:

- For knees: quadriceps, hamstrings, glutes.
- For hips: glutes and core.

- For hands/shoulders: forearms, upper back, and rotator cuff.

Work in pain-free or 'tolerable discomfort' zones, avoiding sharp pain. Fewer repetitions with control are better than pushing through pain.

5 Respect pain, but don't fear all discomfort.

Clients are taught to distinguish between 'good effort' (muscle fatigue, mild stiffness) and 'warning pain' (joint pain that sharpens, lingers, or worsens after exercise). We use a simple 0–10 scale: staying around 3–4 during and after exercise is usually acceptable. If pain spikes and lasts more than 24 hours, we adjust.

6 Flexibility and mobility matter.

Gentle stretching after exercise can ease stiffness. Slow, sustained stretches, never bouncing, are ideal. On high-pain days, we may focus mainly on mobility and stretching instead of strength.

7 Make a backup plan for those flare days.

Arthritis symptoms fluctuate, therefore always have a Plan B session: shorter, gentler, often seated or in water-based environments. The goal is to keep the routine going, even if intensity drops.

8 Progress is about better function, not perfection.

Celebrate wins like walking further, climbing stairs with less effort, or sleeping better. These functional gains are often more important than simply upping the numbers on a barbell.

With a patient, flexible approach, exercise becomes a powerful tool, not just to manage arthritis, but to reclaim confidence, independence and joy in movement



Works wonders from the comfort of home

For many people living with arthritis, exercise can feel intimidating, especially when pain or stiffness are daily occurrences. Yet all too often, change can begin not in a gym or clinic, but right in the comfort of your own home.

Judy Nel knows this first-hand. After spending three years in a wheelchair, she faced challenges with balance, lower-back weakness, and weight gain. Rather than giving up on movement, Judy found creative, manageable ways to rebuild her strength. She bought a stationary cycle, climbed stairs, and even practised standing on one leg to improve her balance.

But it was online yoga that became the cornerstone of her recovery.

Through a YouTube channel called Yes2Next, Judy discovered Chair Yoga, a gentle, accessible form of movement ideal for people with limited mobility. Hosted by April and her 82-year-old grandmother, the sessions transformed

exercise from something daunting into something joyful. Judy strengthened her core and back, improved her fitness, and began losing the weight from years in a wheelchair.

Similarly, a recent study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* found that video-based exercise programmes, combined with online education and support, significantly improved pain and physical function in overweight people with knee osteoarthritis. In the *Better Knee, Better Me* trial, researchers from the University of Melbourne followed 416 participants with persistent knee pain over six months.

Participants received telehealth exercise programmes provided by physiotherapists via Zoom. They experienced meaningful improvements in pain, mobility, and quality of life. Those who combined exercise with an online dietary programme achieved even greater



benefits, including reduced pain medication use and an average weight-loss of 10 kilograms.

Online exercise is not a second-best option. For many people with arthritis, it is an accessible, effective, and empowering way to move safely and consistently.

“ Gentle movement, even from a chair, can be the first step towards strength and confidence ”

As Judy's story shows, gentle movement, even from a chair, can be the first step toward strength and renewed independence. If your movement is limited, consider giving online exercise a go, especially chair-based or gentle yoga. Small steps can lead to big changes.

A tribute to our deputy chairman

The Foundation mourns the recent passing of Professor Asgar Kalla who served our organisation over many decades and in many roles.

Born in 1952, he qualified as a medical doctor in the mid-1970s and went on to build a distinguished career in internal medicine and rheumatology.

Over the years, he earned numerous professional accolades and held senior academic and leadership positions, both locally and internationally, reflecting his deep commitment to advancing his field.

Professor Kalla's doctoral thesis was on

the subject of osteoporosis in rheumatoid arthritis.

His career combined clinical excellence with a strong dedication to teaching and research. After completing his early training in major public hospitals, he spent many years in academic medicine, where he played a significant role in mentoring future healthcare professionals and contributing to the development of rheumatology in South Africa.

He will be sorely missed. Zulayga, we are praying for peace for your loved one and strength for you and yours at this sad time.



Treatment innovations in cartilage repair

Innovations in arthritis care are moving beyond simply managing pain. In 2026, the focus is on slowing disease, repairing damage, and tailoring treatment to each person. New developments include regenerative therapies to rebuild cartilage, smart drug delivery systems, AI-assisted diagnosis, and more targeted treatments for both osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

One promising area is cartilage repair. Cartilage is the smooth tissue that allows joints to move easily. In osteoarthritis, this tissue wears down, causing pain and stiffness. At the moment, there are no treatments that can reverse this damage.

Researchers at Queen Mary University of London, led by Dr Suzanne Eldridge, are exploring a new approach. They are studying a natural molecule called Agrin, which is found in healthy cartilage. In early studies, Agrin has shown the ability to repair cartilage and bone.

The team has now developed a version of Agrin suitable for patients and plans to test it further. They also hope to identify

which patients would benefit most, particularly those with joint injuries.

If successful, this research could lead to treatments that not only relieve symptoms but also repair damaged joints. This could mean less pain, better movement, and fewer people needing joint replacement surgery.



No clear funding puts NHI rollout on the back burner

South Africa's National Health Insurance (NHI) rollout has entered a more uncertain phase, with recent developments effectively revising its original timetable. While the NHI Act was signed into law in May 2024, its implementation is designed to occur in stages between 2023 and 2028.

However, the timetable has been revised due to legal and practical challenges. In early 2026, the government confirmed that the implementation of key sections of the NHI Act has been delayed pending Constitutional Court rulings, expected in May 2026. This pause means that critical milestones are unlikely to be met on schedule.

Recent reporting also highlights that several planned deadlines have already slipped, and a final date is expected to be in the 2030s. No clear funding plan and ongoing legal disputes have further complicated progress. The immediate focus has shifted toward strengthening the existing health system and resolving legal challenges before large-scale implementation can proceed.

Medical schemes are expected to continue operating in their current form, likely for the next 10 to 15 years, due to legal and financial constraints on the rapid rollout.

Smiling seventies

Key habits of people who age with grace and glowing vitality



By ARTHRITIS INSIGHT REPORTER

Reaching your seventies can bring a sense of slowing down or even withdrawing from life. Yet we meet people in this decade who seem to glow, not because they are free of challenges such as arthritis, but because of how they choose to live with them.

Rather than viewing their seventies as a period of decline, these people embrace it as a time of reinvention, purpose, and connection.

Research and lived experience suggest that this vitality is less about genetics and more about daily habits that support all-round wellbeing.

Purpose

A sense of purpose is central. Whether through volunteering, part-time work, creative pursuits, or caring for others, having a reason to get up each morning keeps both mind and body engaged. Purpose gives structure to the day and meaning to movement, even on difficult pain days.

Consistent, joyful movement is another cornerstone. Instead of high-impact exercise, many glowing seniors choose sustainable activities such as walking, swimming, gardening, stretching, or dancing. These forms of movement support joint health, circulation, balance, and mood, while being kinder to arthritic bodies.

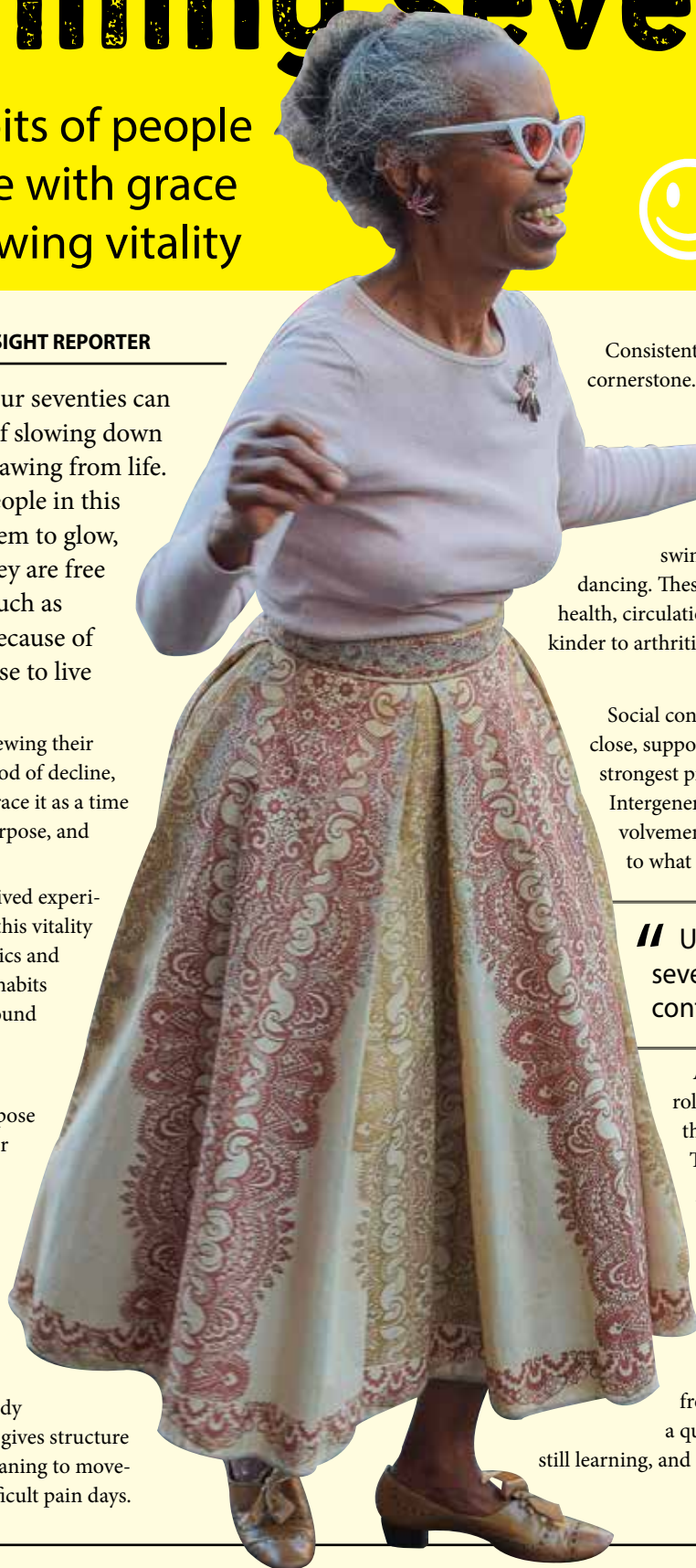
Social Connections

Social connections are vital. Studies show that close, supportive relationships are among the strongest predictors of happiness and longevity. Intergenerational friendships, community involvement, and regular social contact contribute to what some researchers call the “social glow.”

// Ultimately, the glow of a seventy-something comes from continued participation in life //

A pro-aging mindset also plays a key role. Rather than striving to look younger, these individuals focus on feeling well. This means prioritising hydration, sleep, joint care, gentle skincare, and listening to their bodies. Many describe a sense of freedom that comes with acceptance: letting go of past regrets and unrealistic expectations.

Ultimately, the glow of being a thriving seventy-something comes from continued participation in life. It is a quiet confidence that says: I am still here, still learning, and still living fully, arthritis and all.



The inspiration to live a full life that little Emily-Ann brings to her battle with a rare disease is testament to the healing power of...



A BRAVE heart

Born on the 4th of June, 2018, weighing a healthy 3.4 kilograms, Emily-Ann entered the world as a bright, joyful baby girl with no complications.

Her laughter filled the home, and her smile could light up any room. Like every parent, her mom believed she had a perfectly healthy child.

But when Emily was just six months old, subtle changes began to appear. Her skin became unusually sensitive, showing signs that resembled eczema. Because eczema ran in the family, it seemed like a reasonable diagnosis. After a series of allergy tests, doctors discovered that Emily was allergic to cow's milk, nuts, and wheat products, and she was prescribed a special formula, NAN HA.

Yet, by eight months old, her skin condition hadn't improved.

Her mom sought answers, visiting one dermatologist after another, but none could explain why the lesions kept spreading or why the irritation worsened.

By ARTHRITIS INSIGHT REPORTER

By the time Emily turned two years old, her creche teacher noticed something alarming: Emily struggled to climb, run, or keep up with her classmates like she used to. Concerned, her mom went back to the pediatrician, who ordered x-rays. Everything appeared "normal."

“ Emily-Ann was living with Juvenile Dermatomyositis, a rare autoimmune disease that affects skin and muscles ”

Still, a mother's intuition knew something wasn't right. Emily's lesions darkened, she lost so much weight, and she often woke up with stiff, aching limbs. The constant itching, the flare-ups, and her discomfort became impossible to ignore.

It took the wisdom and intervention of her grandmother's own doctor, Professor David Epstein, to connect Emily's mom

with Dr Carol Hehla, who then referred them to Dr Kate Webb.

Dr Webb immediately recognised the signs and confirmed what no one else had before. Emily-Ann was living with Juvenile Dermatomyositis (JDM), a rare autoimmune disease that affects the skin and muscles.

Life with JDM and Beyond

Even after her diagnosis, the journey didn't end. Further testing revealed that Emily also suffers from severe eczema and a long list of allergies, including dust mites, grass, nuts, and animals. Her body often communicates distress through her skin: when she catches a cold or flu, her lesion flares up, turning red — a unique signal that something inside her isn't right.

Despite it all, Emily's strength shines. She rarely falls seriously ill, manages her arthritis symptoms especially during the cold months, and continues to approach life with courage and joy. She knows her limits and listens to her body, avoiding strenuous activity while exploring her love for art, colouring, and chess.



RESILIENT: Emily-Ann's strength shines



ATTENTIVE: Her report card glows



RARE WARRIOR: She stays optimistic

in a SMALL body

Now a Grade 1 student, Emily has missed more than 30 days of school this year due to her episodic skin reactions, but that hasn't stopped her from excelling. Her report card beams with 6s and 7s, and her favorite subject, Mathematics, is always a 7.

// There are days at school when Emily feels frustrated or left out ... but she never lets those moments define her **//**

Recently, the side-effects of her medication affected her eyesight, and she now proudly wears her glasses. This is another testament to how she embraces every part of her journey with grace.

Resilience in Motion

There are days when Emily feels frustrated or left out, especially during physical activities at school, but she never lets those moments define her. Instead, she uses them as motivation. During break time, she practises her handstands.

She is determined to grow stronger and tries her best to do so.

She's bright, talkative, and full of life, though she prefers smaller groups where she feels most at ease.

Her resilience radiates in how she faces each challenge with optimism and strength beyond her years.

Finding Purpose Through Pain

There was a time when Emily felt unworthy, when her differences made her question her place in the world. But through The Emily-Ann Foundation, she found meaning in her journey.

Now, Emily wants to be a voice for the voiceless — to show every “rare warrior” that they are not alone, that they are beautiful, and that their uniqueness makes them powerful. Her story is a beacon of hope to families walking a similar path.

The Heart of Her World

Emily lives with her loving mom, Shani, and her grandmother, who are both her greatest supporters and caretakers. She spends weekends with her dad and adores

her little brother, Zachariah, along with her Granny Leonie.

Though living between homes and managing a rare condition can be challenging, Shani ensures that Emily receives the best care possible. This means keeping up with her doctors, therapies, and awareness work to educate others about JDM and other rare diseases.

A Message of Hope

Emily-Ann may look like an ordinary child, laughing, playing, and learning like everyone else, but behind her radiant smile lies an extraordinary story of courage. Her life reminds us that even the smallest warriors can carry the biggest light.

She is not defined by her illness, but by her strength.

She is not limited by her challenges, but inspired by them.

And through her journey, she reminds us that every rare warrior deserves to be seen, celebrated, and supported.

Healthy budget

Healthy joints



Economical anti-inflammatory recipes focus on affordable, whole-food staples like beans, lentils, frozen vegetables, leafy greens, and spices such as turmeric and ginger. These ingredients are rich in antioxidants and healthy fats that help combat inflammation.

Here are several budget-friendly anti-inflammatory recipes:

Breakfast

• **Oatmeal with berries and walnuts:** A high-fibre, antioxidant-rich meal. Use frozen berries to save money.

• **Turmeric vegetable omelet:** Sauté spinach and onions in olive oil, then add eggs mixed with turmeric and black pepper for better absorption.

• **Chia seed pudding:** Mix chia seeds with almond milk and top with berries.

• **Savory oatmeal:** Top oats with a fried egg and wilted kale.



Lunch

• **Chickpea tuna salad:** A pantry-staple meal combining canned chickpeas, canned tuna (high in omega-3s), capers, and feta.

• **Quinoa, chickpea and kale salad:** A high-fibre, plant-based, and filling meal using olive oil and lemon juice.

• **Grilled sauerkraut, hummus and avocado sandwich:** Uses probiotics in sauerkraut to promote a healthy gut, reducing inflammation.

• **Mason jar power salad:** Combine kale, beans and tuna with a vinaigrette in a jar for a grab-and-go option.



Dinner

• **Golden lentil and vegetable soup:** A one-pot meal with lentils, carrots, celery, kale, and turmeric.

• **Sheet-pan salmon and broccoli:** A fast, 20-minute meal using frozen or fresh salmon and broccoli with olive oil.

• **Turmeric chicken and sweet potato bowl:** A balanced, flavourful meal that uses economical root vegetables.

• **Vegetarian bean chili:** A versatile, high-fibre dish using various beans, tomatoes and spices.

• **White bean and spinach skillet:** A fast, 15-minute meal using white beans, fresh greens and garlic.



Economical Tips

• **Stock up on pantry staples:** Keep canned beans, lentils, brown rice, nuts, seeds and extra-virgin olive oil on hand.

• **Use frozen produce:** Frozen vegetables and berries are often cheaper and just as nutritious as fresh.

• **Focus on turmeric:** Turmeric and black pepper are low-cost, powerful anti-inflammatory additions to almost any dish.

• **Cook once, eat twice:** Cook a batch of grains or roasted veggies.



FAREWELL: Magdelie de Kock, OT



HPF: From left: Fikile Sohuma, Wilna le Roux, Vicki Sanan and Abo Dlamini



LEADERS: Halima Cassim Suleman head of OT with Dr Emma Gardiner

Progressing through partnerships in care

Greetings from Gqeberha. It has been another challenging year in the Eastern Cape yet, supported by our tireless stakeholders, we remain undaunted and continue to broaden our footprint in the region.

A highlight on our calendar was World Arthritis Day 2025, once again driven by the Occupational Therapy Department at Livingstone Hospital. Their innovative and self-sustaining support group, Rheuma Has It, in collaboration with the Rheumatoid Arthritis Clinic, as well as the Dietetics and Physiotherapy Departments, delivered an engaging programme.

We were proud to welcome Professor Raj Naidoo as keynote speaker. His talk, Health Harmony, Holism, and Hope, explored a modern, integrated approach to healing within an evolving healthcare landscape. Head of internal medicine and rheumatology Dr Emma Gardiner also delivered a practical and insightful session on the four S's of early arthritis detection, highlighting key warning signs such as stiffness, swelling, the squeeze test and the importance of seeking help. Thank you to both these experts in their fields for sharing their valuable knowledge

A particularly proud moment was the announcement of the newly elected Rheuma Has It executive committee. Congratulations are due to Magdelie de Kock (CEO), Emma van Rhyn (Vice CEO), (Alice Johnson (Chair), Julie-Ann Booyesen (Vice-Chair), Leonore Geduld

(Secretary), Sernique Fondling (Vice-Secretary), Fahiemma Frieslaar (Treasurer) and Lyndall Hendricks (Vice-Treasurer). Congratulations to you all for volunteering to carry out these vital tasks.

The Health Promotion Forum, under the leadership of Ms

Fikile Sohuma, continues to be a solid pillar helping us to reach those in need. At the same time, we bid a heartfelt farewell to Ms Wilma le Roux, a longstanding education specialist with our local Department of Education. We wish her well in her retirement and welcome her successor, Mr Abo Dlamini. We also thank and say goodbye to Magdelie de Kock for her dedicated service as she transitions into private practice with Hands On OT on the Cape Road. All the best, Mags, and keep up the good work. Emma van Rhyn will continue to fly the banner in the Livingstone Hospital OT Department. A big thank-you to these stalwarts.

continue to fly the banner in the Livingstone Hospital OT Department. A big thank-you to these stalwarts.

As this issue focuses on exercise, please remember that it is vital to keep moving and watch your diets. Staying active remains one of the most powerful tools in managing arthritis and enhancing overall wellbeing.

In conclusion, we will soon be hosting our Awareness Days at St John the Baptist Anglican Church in Walmer. These events will feature expert speakers and refreshments, all offered free of charge. To receive an invitation, we kindly ask that you share your email address with us by contacting info@arthritis.org.za. This initiative extends beyond the Eastern Cape, so wherever you are based, we encourage you to get in touch and stay connected by sending the Foundation your email address.



VITALITY: The Rheuma Has It team



Activating outreach



SHARE: Dewetshof retirement home



USEFUL: Kensington wellness day



LIVELY: Foundation sponsored Padel



CELEBRATION: World Arthritis Day

The Foundation has been actively engaging with communities across Gauteng. Here's what we've been up to since the last issue of *Arthritis Insight*.

Community Education and Outreach

We continued delivering talks and practical guidance across several retirement homes. We were always welcomed with gratitude and enthusiasm.

- **1 July: First Aid Training.** We learned the basics around dealing with strokes, heart attacks, and sudden health crises.

- **15 July: Randjes Estate, Highlands North.** A large audience joined us for an arthritis-focused talk, giving the Foundation a generous donation.

- **22 July: Dewetshof Retirement Home.** We spent an uplifting time with the ladies supported by the Salvation Army, sharing education, conversation and eats.

- **28 August: Flower Foundation Kensington Retirement Home.** We hosted an interactive Q&A session based on articles from the previous *Arthritis Insight*. What a lovely interactive discussion it was.

- **1 October: Maxhaven Retirement Home.** Another meaningful session with residents eager to learn more about managing arthritis day-to-day.

- **25 November at Witpoortjie Flower Foundation, Roodepoort.** We recently received a lovely thank-you letter and a request to continue into the new year.

OA Awareness Day

17 July: We hosted our **Osteoarthritis (OA) Awareness Day** in Pretoria, where Alnari Matthyser delivered a presentation on OA conditions and nutrition. Lynnette de Villiers of Cornerstone Lodge kindly donated her beautiful venue and we were ably assisted in organising the event by our wonderful ex-colleague Pat van der Valk.

Wellness Day

17 October: Kensington Flower Foun-

By NADINE LEMMER & BRENDA SPENCE

dation. We were invited to join a wellness and awareness event alongside partners such as Clinical Emergencies, Coachman's Pharmacy, and the University of Johannesburg's Departments of Podiatry and Chiropractics. An audiologist offered free consultations. Great attendance and we made some excellent contacts there.

Patient Advocacy Programme

The Foundation is developing a patient advocacy project. To guide our early steps, we met with Lizette Swanepoel (AbbVie Care Coach) and Lindi Swanepoel (Patient Experience Manager). Thank you both for your excellent input and time shared.

World Arthritis Day Film Evenings

Partnering with Zydus Pharmaceuticals, we helped host two special World Arthritis Day movie nights in late October.

The featured film, *Maudie*, tells the true story of folk artist Maud Lewis, who lived with rheumatoid arthritis while navigating the memory of a lost child, and a family that doubted her abilities.

The movie was very insightful with the audience giving rave reviews. We thank Zydus Pharmaceutical for inviting us to join with them and look forward to working with them in the future.

Support Group: Pain Café

Occupational Therapist Dershnee Devon, who specialises in pain management, has launched Pain Café, a support group where individuals can share experiences and receive guidance over a cup of coffee.

The first meeting took place on 17 November, and in 2026 the group meets monthly from February to November, each session exploring one of the *10 Footsteps to Recovery from Live Well With Pain*.

Complementary Therapies Padel Event

To end on an energetic note, we sponsored a Padel day at Greenstone Shopping Centre, hosted by Padel 360. Sixteen players participated in a festive event.

Joburg



GLITZ: Lupus initiative Bollywood show



DAY TRIP: Helderberg Nature Reserve



EDUCATOR: Cape's Lorraine Mantini

GROWING our Cape community projects

The Cape Town region of the Arthritis Foundation of South Africa has continued to expand its community outreach efforts, bringing education and awareness about arthritis to communities across the Western Cape.

In June, The Foundation was invited by the Western Cape Education Department's Safe Schools Project to participate in the Tulbagh Boys Camp.

Our staff presented a workshop on Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis to 60 boys and their facilitators, helping raise awareness that arthritis can affect children and adolescents, not only adults.

In July, we hosted an Osteoarthritis Awareness Day at Gleemor Baptist Church Hall, attended by 73 people. The session provided practical information to those living with the condition.

Community outreach continued when the City of Cape Town

By JULIE MARTIN & LORRAINE MANTINI

Municipality's Ward 37 invited the Foundation to present an arthritis awareness talk in the Strandfontein area. In August, the Retreat Arthritis Support Group also hosted a special presentation on fibromyalgia, a chronic pain condition.

September was an especially busy month. A talk hosted by the Rondevlei Women's Christian Association in Pinelands attracted 125 attendees. At a children's camp organised by the Education Department at Wellington School of Skills, 120 learners attended educational sessions.

// Participants enjoyed a day in nature, having fun while also learning about rheumatic conditions //

A unique event took place at Helderberg Nature Reserve, organised by rheumatoid arthritis advocate Sumaya Gasnola. Participants enjoyed a day in nature, having fun while also learning about scleroderma and other rheumatic conditions.

The Foundation also contributed to the CHAT (Children Have Arthritis Too) programme at Apex Primary School in Stellenbosch, after being invited by paediatric



AWARENESS: Osteoarthritis day

ric rheumatologist Dr Waheeba Slamang.

One of the highlights of the year was the World Arthritis Day celebration held at Ikamva Labantu in October, attended by 184 people. The event reinforced the importance of awareness, education, and support for those living with arthritis.

The year concluded with a Lupus Initiative Bollywood Show at the Joseph Stone Auditorium. More than 500 attendees joined the event, where Foundation representative Julie Martin addressed the audience about arthritis awareness. The evening raised R20 000 to support lupus awareness.



BUSY YEAR: Julie Martin



Dates to diarise

10 May	LUPUS DAY
15 May	ELSEN GOLF DAY AT HUMEWOOD
29 June	SCLERODOMA DAY
27 July	OSTEOARTHRITIS DAY
20 August	FIBROMYALGIA DAY
12 October	WORLD ARTHRITIS DAY
23 November	COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES DAY



IMPORTANT DATES

Early Bird Registration

- Opens: Tues, 23 Sept 2025
- Closes: Fri, 27 Feb 2026

Abstract Submissions

- Opens: Tues, 23 Sept 2025
- Closes: Fri, 27 Feb 2026

Online Registration

- Closes: Mon, 27 Apr 2026

Rheumatology congress

The South African Rheumatology and Arthritis Association (SARAA) Congress 2026 will take place from 7 to 10 May at the CSIR International Convention Centre in Pretoria, bringing together members of South Africa's rheumatology community and international experts. Held biennially, the congress is a key event for showcasing the latest developments in rheumatology both locally and globally.

Under the theme "Rheumatology Heroes: Stronger through unity, unstoppable through purpose," the programme will feature leading keynote speakers, interactive sessions, and original research across a wide range of topics. In addition to its academic focus, the congress offers valuable opportunities for networking, collaboration, and professional connection through planned social events.

The event aims to inspire, inform, and strengthen connections within the rheumatology community, with broad participation contributing to its ongoing success.



Exercise tips

Morning Mobility

Start your day with 5–10 minutes of gentle movement.

- Slow neck turns, shoulder rolls, wrist circles
- March on the spot or do heel raises holding a chair

Think of it as “oiling your joints” before you take on the day.

Pacing on Flare Days

Moving during a flare can feel scary – but full rest can worsen stiffness.

- Use the “little and often” rule: very short, gentle movements
 - Alternate activity with rest
 - Focus on easy range-of-motion rather than exercise goals
- Listen to your body, not your fear.

Joint-Friendly Cardio

Low-impact movement protects your joints while helping your heart. Try walking on flat ground, stationary cycling, water aerobics or swimming

You should be able to talk but not sing, as an intensity guide

MINI-MOVES

You don't need a full workout to benefit.

- Aim for 3–5 mini-sessions of activity spread through the day
- Set a timer every hour: stand, stretch, walk to the kitchen and back

Little bursts add up – every minute of movement counts.

Reconnect with JOY

Make It Enjoyable

You're more likely to stick with movement that you like.

- Walk with a friend or join a gentle class
- Put on your favourite music and dance while sitting or standing
- Track your progress in a notebook or app

The best exercise is the one you'll keep doing.

Strength for Daily Life

Stronger muscles mean less strain on sore joints.

- Use light hand-weights, resistance bands or even tins of food
- Focus on big muscle groups: thighs, hips, back, shoulders

Gentle stretching keeps you flexible eases stiffness.

- Warm up first with a short walk or some marching on the spot
- Hold each stretch 15–30 seconds, no bouncing. Aim for “comfortable stretch”, not pain.





You gotta move it move it...

Staying active is one of the best ways to manage arthritis. Gentle, regular movement helps keep joints flexible, reduces stiffness, and supports balance and strength. A simple daily mobility routine of 15 to 30 minutes can help seniors maintain independence and improve overall comfort.

Morning is often the best time to perform mobility exercises, as joints tend to feel stiff after a night's rest. The goal is not strenuous exercise but slow, controlled movements that gently wake up the body.

Daily mobility routine components:

- **Warm-up:** Gentle marching in place or shoulder rolls.
- **Neck and upper body:** Neck stretches (side-to-side), arm circles (forward/backward), and "cactus arms" (pinching shoulder blades).
- **Core and trunk:** Seated spinal twists or side bends to improve rotation and flexibility.
- **Lower body and hips:** Hip circles, hip flexor stretches, and heel-to-toe raises.
- **Balance and strength:** Standing on one foot (using a chair for support), chair squats, and wall push-ups.

Key tips for success:

- **Consistency:** Aim for light activity daily, with more structured movement 2 to 3 times per week.
- **Safety first:** Use a sturdy chair for balance exercises and never stretch to the point of pain.
- **Breathing:** Perform movements slowly, focusing on deep breathing, especially during stretches.
- **Activity type:** Mix in 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity (like brisk walking or swimming) most days.





ON THE LEVEL: Camps Bay pipe track



Walking the Cape



You don't have to climb Table Mountain to enjoy movement

By ARTHRITIS INSIGHT REPORTER

Cape Town is made for walking. There are ocean views, leafy greenbelts, mountain contours and lovely neighbourhood parks on our doorstep.

But if you live with arthritis, you might feel unsure where to start, or worry that the city's famous hikes are too much for your joints. Here's the good news: you don't have to climb Table Mountain to enjoy the benefits of moving your body. Gentle, accessible walks can still support your joints.

Lower the bar and start with the easiest ground. For many people with arthritis, flat, even surfaces are the most comfortable place to begin.

Sea Point Promenade is one of the best options. The paved walkway is flat, wide and busy enough to feel safe. There are benches to rest, toilets nearby and plenty of coffee stops.

In the southern suburbs, Keurboom Park in Rondebosch and Wynberg Park offer shorter, softer walks. Paved paths let you choose small loops rather than committing to a long route. If you're ready for something a little more

outdoorsy without tackling steep trails, the forests and greenbelts are a lovely middle ground.

Newlands Forest has shaded contour paths where you can walk short sections at your own pace. The ground is uneven in places, so this is best on a good joint day, and the cool forest air makes it all the more worthwhile.

The Constantia and Cecilia greenbelts offer gentle paths alongside streams and under trees. The terrain rolls slightly but is generally forgiving. You can design your own 20 to 30 minute loop and gradually build up over time.

For some, a short "real mountain" experience is motivating.

The Pipe Track, starting above Camps Bay, is an excellent option. There is a short climb at the start, but once on the contour the path is relatively level, with glorious views of the Atlantic.

Kloof Corner is a brief, steeper walk with steps, leading to a spectacular viewpoint. It's better suited to those whose arthritis is fairly well controlled, and should be avoided on very hot days.

Walking wisely with arthritis

Whatever route you choose, a few principles keep walking joint-friendly:

Options in the Eastern Cape

For hiking in Gqeberha, several reliable resources stand out. The All-Trails app offers a range of mapped routes and user reviews, making it ideal for planning. Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism provides trusted local insights, highlighting popular trails like Sacramento and Cape Recife.

For more nature-focused routes, 3Rivers Trails features forest and dam hikes, while SA-Venues.com offers a broader overview of hikes and walks in the area.

These platforms cover everything from well-known coastal trails to more secluded inland routes, catering to all experience levels.

- It's about time, not distance – for example, 10 minutes out, 10 minutes back.
- On high-pain days, choose flatter parks rather than rocky trails.
- Use walking poles or a stick if they make you feel more stable.

With realistic goals and the right setting, walking in and around Cape Town can become a gentle, enjoyable part of living well with arthritis.





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ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION OF SOUTH AFRICA



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SIGN UP AND JOIN OUR COMMUNITY

The Arthritis Foundation is a patient-orientated, non-profit organisation that is dedicated to education, assistance, and informing the public on the impact and consequences of arthritis.

You receive:

- Access to the latest information
- Free access to *Arthritis Insight* magazine online
- On-call support from our national helpline
- Invitations to events with leading specialists

We have new and updated material on everything arthritis.

If medical doctors and other healthcare professionals would like us to deliver this updated material to their facilities, we invite them to email info@arthritis.org.za.



Go to our website and sign up to join our community

www.arthritis.org.za



Thank you to our funders and supporters

Your donations have helped us provide much-needed training, awareness, educational support and advocacy to our members and to the needy communities in which we offer services. With support like yours, we are able to build intergenerational programming and a stronger community for all people living with arthritis. The world is a better place with people like you in it.

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