

Exercise as a Supportive Treatment for my Ankylosing Spondylitis

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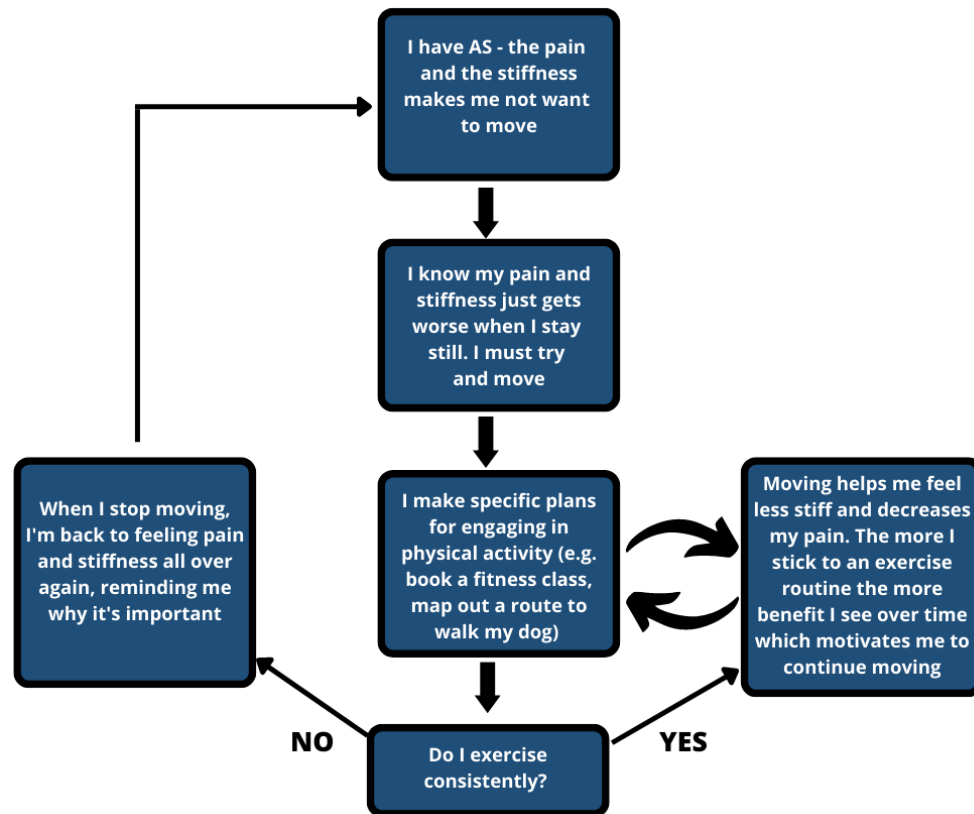
Background

Patients with autoimmune rheumatic diseases (ARDs) are often caught in a paradox as they experience mobility challenges, but long periods of immobility cause increased stiffness and pain. I have been living with symptoms of Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS) for eleven years. It took almost 4 years from onset of symptoms to my diagnosis. Before I received a diagnosis, I tried to manage my symptoms on a regimen of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). I had always been an active person, but the joint pain and stiffness that started when I was twenty-two years old made it almost impossible for me to participate in the activities and sports I enjoyed. I had completely lost my identity as an athlete.

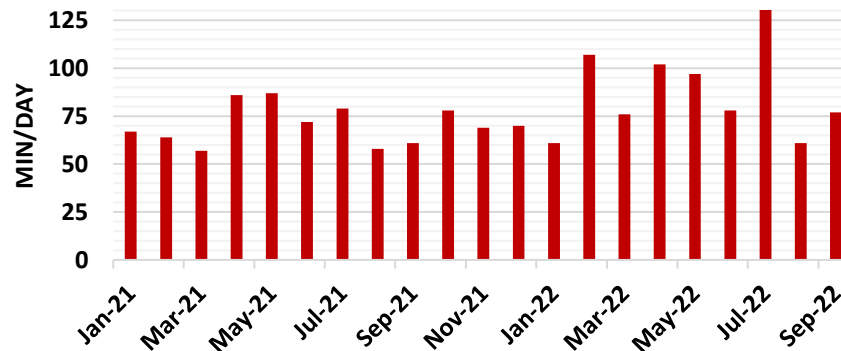
Intervention

When I received my diagnosis at the age of twenty-six, I was started on a biologic treatment for my AS. I was finally able to sleep through the night and I no longer had to worry about leaving the house without my NSAIDs. As my body began to respond to treatment, I slowly began to regain the mobility I had lost and was able to engage in more physical activity. I joined a gym for the first time and committed to going to morning fitness classes to improve my cardiovascular fitness and muscular strength and extend my range of motion.

Resisting the Vicious Cycle: My Thought Process to Motivate Me to Move



Average daily Exercise Minutes



Maintenance

With my combination of adhering to my treatment of a monthly biologic injection and daily morning exercise routine, I have felt virtually in remission for the last 7 years. Missing even a day or two at the gym can aggravate my stiffness and increase my pain. Committing to a structured exercise plan is what has kept my AS symptoms at bay. This has increased my range of motion and muscle strength as well as helped my mental health. The cumulative effects of this have extended to multiple facets of my well-being making me less stressed, more patient and overall happier.

Quality of Life

I have a newfound appreciation for my body: what it has been through and what it has been able to achieve. Although I know that my biologics might stop working as effectively and I may start to experience flares again, I must trust that, as long as I keep moving, I will win the battle against AS.



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