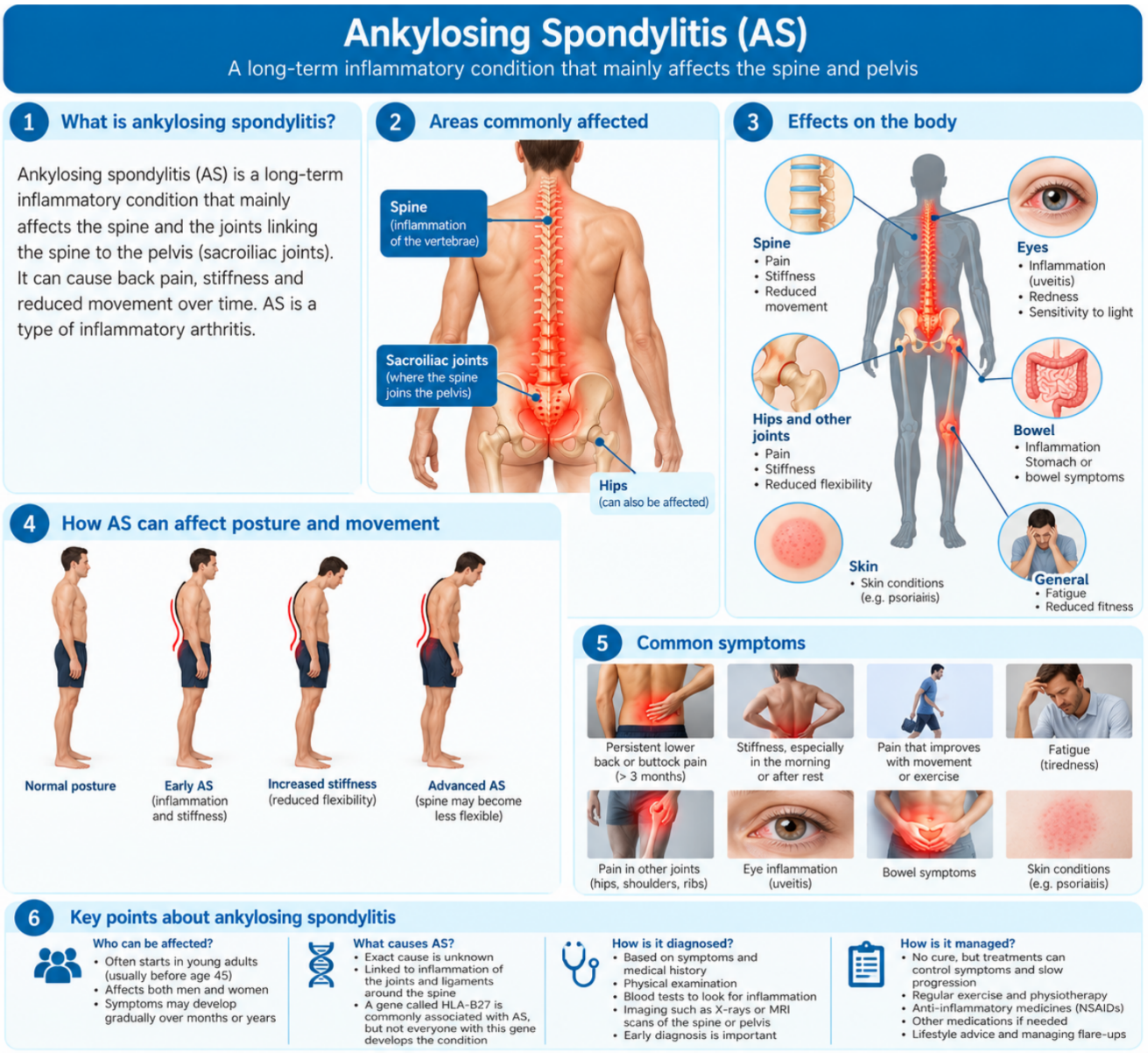
Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS)

Understanding inflammatory back pain, symptoms and care

Berkshire West Primary Care Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Services

Ankylosing Spondylitis

A guide to symptoms, treatment and recovery



What is ankylosing spondylitis?

Ankylosing spondylitis (AS) is a long-term inflammatory condition mainly affecting the spine and sacroiliac joints. It can cause back pain, stiffness and reduced movement. AS is a type of inflammatory arthritis.

Symptoms and diagnosis

Recognising symptoms and understanding assessment

Who can be affected?

AS often begins before age 45 and affects both men and women. Symptoms may develop gradually over months or years.

Common symptoms

Persistent lower back or buttock pain lasting over three months, morning stiffness, pain that improves with movement, reduced flexibility and fatigue.

Other symptoms

Some people experience pain in the hips, shoulders or ribs, eye inflammation (uveitis), bowel symptoms or skin conditions.

What causes AS?

The exact cause is unknown. Inflammation affects joints and ligaments around the spine. HLA-B27 is associated with AS, but not everyone carrying it develops the condition.

How is AS diagnosed?

Assessment includes symptoms, medical history, examination, blood tests for inflammation, and sometimes X-rays or MRI of the spine or pelvis.

Exercises and rehabilitation

Gentle movement to maintain flexibility and posture

Exercise examples

Movement and stretching can help maintain flexibility and function. Ask your physiotherapist which exercises are suitable for you.



Treatment and management

Practical approaches to improve movement and comfort

Exercise and physiotherapy

Regular exercise is important. Stretching and posture exercises can maintain spinal movement. Physiotherapy can provide a tailored programme.

Medication

Anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs) may reduce pain and stiffness. Specialists may prescribe disease-modifying medicines or biologic treatments.

Lifestyle advice

Stay physically active, maintain good posture, avoid smoking and aim for a healthy weight.

Managing flare-ups

Keep moving within comfort, use heat to ease stiffness, pace activities and rest when needed.

When to seek medical advice

Contact your GP or healthcare professional if pain or stiffness worsens, new joint pain or swelling develops, eye pain or redness occurs, or symptoms affect sleep or daily life.

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