Axial Spondyloarthritis (axSpA): A Patient Leaflet

Axial Spondyloarthritis (axSpA): A Patient Guide

What is axSpA?
Axial Spondyloarthritis (axSpA) is a type of inflammatory arthritis that primarily affects the spine and sacroiliac joints (where the spine meets the pelvis). It can be classified as:
- Radiographic axSpA (Ankylosing Spondylitis), where damage shows on X-rays
- Non-radiographic axSpA, where inflammation is seen on MRI but not yet on X-ray

Who does it affect?
- Onset usually between ages 15–35 (average 26)
- Affects around 1 in 200 people
- More common in men (2:1 ratio)

Symptoms of axSpA:
- Persistent lower back pain and stiffness, especially in the morning
- Pain improves with movement but worsens with rest
- Buttock pain (from sacroiliac joint inflammation)
- Fatigue
- Painful joints (e.g., hips, shoulders)
- Enthesitis (tendon/ligament inflammation)
- Associated conditions: psoriasis, uveitis (eye inflammation), Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis

Diagnosis:
- Inflammatory back pain pattern
- Blood tests (CRP, ESR, HLA-B27)
- MRI scan of sacroiliac joints
- Important to distinguish from mechanical back pain or disc disease

Treatment:
1. First-line: NSAIDs (e.g., naproxen) and physiotherapy with daily stretching
2. Biologic medications if needed (TNF inhibitors, IL-17 inhibitors) — prescribed by rheumatologists following NICE guidance

Self-Management Tips:
- Daily tailored exercise routines
- Avoid smoking (linked to worse disease progression)
- Maintain healthy weight and posture
- Use trusted resources like NASS (National Axial Spondyloarthritis Society)

Final Message:
AxSpA can be managed successfully with early diagnosis and the right treatment plan. Stay active, informed, and in touch with your care team.

Sources: NICE NG65, BMJ Best Practice, BRITSpA, NASS

Visual Guide to axSpA

Note: The following are placeholders for medical diagrams or infographics.

[Diagram: Spine and sacroiliac joints highlighting inflammation]

[Infographic: Inflammatory vs mechanical back pain]

[Infographic: axSpA treatment pathway]

[Exercise Diagram: Stretches for axSpA]