

The benefits of regular physiotherapy

In last autumn's edition of AS News we let you know that Gareth, a very kind NASS member offered to pay for a year of private physiotherapy sessions for a NASS member who was unable to access physiotherapy either through a NASS group or the NHS.

Thank you to everyone who applied to receive the physiotherapy. In the end, Gareth chose to fund physiotherapy for not just one but two NASS members! Thank you so much Gareth. Kelly and Adrian have written about how they have benefited from weekly physiotherapy.

Kelly's story

I am 27 years old and was diagnosed with AS two years ago. I first presented with symptoms at the age of 17 but like so many, went undiagnosed for years.

My initial symptoms were quite unexpected and took both my family and myself by surprise. After several unsuccessful GP appointments and a MRI scan that came back 'normal', I was unable to get any answers as to why I was in so much discomfort. So I persisted for years, refusing as best as I could to not allow the pain to compromise my studies.

As the years passed me by, my symptoms became increasingly intense and prolonged, so I decided to pay for a course of private physiotherapy to ease my pain and stiffness. This was a real turning point for me - it was here that my symptoms were immediately recognised and I was swiftly referred to a rheumatologist at my local hospital, who diagnosed me with AS.

Getting diagnosed was, in so many ways a relief, as I finally had an answer as to why I was feeling so awful. However, it was also incredibly daunting, as being so young and leading such an active life as a singer, I was concerned about the impact AS would have on my life.

After my diagnosis, I continued to have private physiotherapy as often as I could afford, and I also took up Pilates and swimming. Pilates has really helped to establish my core stability and I found that swimming loosened me up a great deal. Even though my physio sessions were few and far between, I looked forward to them immensely as I knew I would always leave feeling so much better.



It was purely by chance last Christmas that I stumbled across the offer in AS News. I submitted my application and was lucky enough to be shortlisted and then selected for funding.

I am currently four months into my treatment and I am feeling great - the benefits are profound. Each weekly session consists of mobilisation techniques to mobilise stiff joints, trigger point release to ease off a surrounding muscle that has gone into spasm, guidance on stretches relevant to the areas of pain and stiffness I am experiencing, and most recently acupuncture on the sore points on my spine, neck and shoulders.

The relief is almost instant and I walk away eased of pain and stiffness. Combining physio with swimming and Pilates has allowed me to become less reliant on my medication and has really given me such comfort and support.

Physiotherapy has played such an important role in my diagnosis and indeed my journey through AS. The private physio I have received has made a tremendous difference to my mobility and is instrumental in controlling the level of pain and stiffness I experience on a daily basis.

AS wasn't part of my life plan, and to this day it doesn't shape my life choices. I have made an active decision to continue my journey without restriction, and physiotherapy has really made this possible.

My sincere thanks to NASS for all of their support, Sandra Lamb at The Rainham Physiotherapy Centre and also a tremendous thank you to Gareth for his generosity and for giving me the opportunity of receiving weekly physiotherapy – it really has made my life brighter.

Adrian's story

I was diagnosed with AS in 2005. I live and work in County Down, Northern Ireland. I am married with two children aged 11 and 8. I am a chef by profession.

Before starting the physiotherapy sessions the effects of AS made my life very difficult to manage. The physical and mental demands of my work as a chef and the challenges of raising two young children, along with the constant pain and restricted mobility of AS made my life a real struggle.

I had a constant need for medication to reduce the pain. My morale was low and I was left with little energy, when it came to interacting with my family after work. Whilst my work as a chef is rewarding, it is physically

demanding, involving using the body in many different ways in a confined space in high temperatures. Before starting my physiotherapy sessions this work was quite overwhelming.



My weekly physiotherapy sessions included a range of movement exercises, stretching, strengthening and endurance exercises, balance activities and core stability exercises. The physiotherapist looked at my posture and gait and gave me advice on improving both. She also gave me acupuncture to help with the pain. Finally, she gave me a home exercise programme to carry out between sessions.

The benefits of the regular physio sessions have been very impressive. I have a reduced need for pain control, increased mobility and I feel much more relaxed.

My morale is higher and I am much more enthusiastic about my work. I have more energy for engaging with my family.

Overall, I now have a higher quality of life as a result of the physio sessions, which I have to say I initially approached with a degree of scepticism. My postural awareness and ability to self manage my condition and monitor symptoms have significantly improved.

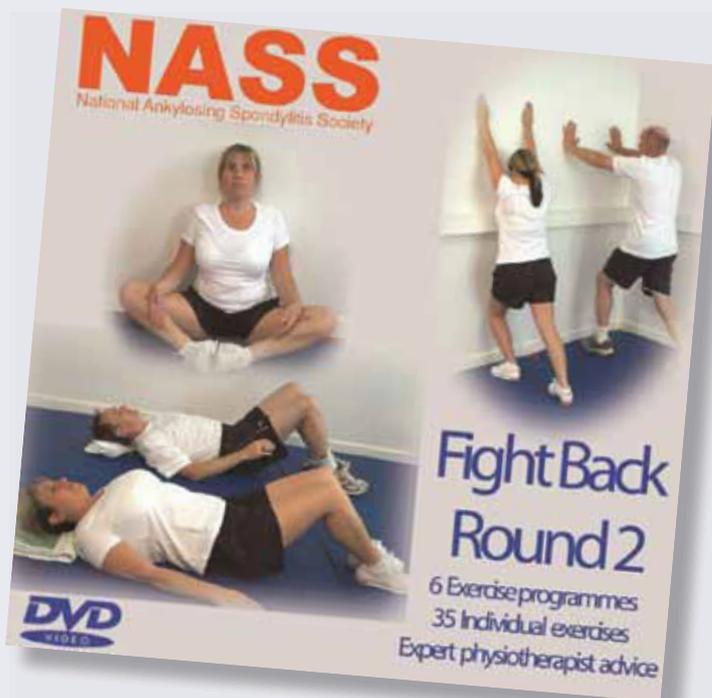
View from the NASS physiotherapist

We can see from these two very fortunate NASS members, Kelly and Adrian, how regular one to one physiotherapy can really help target specific problem areas such as posture, tight muscles, reduced range of movement and pain, receiving treatment and advice and of course getting a personalised home exercise regime to carry on with the good work by themselves at home.

This is why it is so important that you attend your annual review at the hospital or with your physiotherapist (even if you are feeling fine), so that any problems or deterioration in your posture or flexibility can be picked up and worked on straight away. It may be enough to alter your home exercise regime or else it may be appropriate for you to attend a course of physiotherapy at the hospital or your GP surgery depending where you're managed and looked after. If you are not under a rheumatologist or have not been to see him/her for some years it is worth asking your GP for a referral back to your rheumatologist for a medical and physio review.

Of course don't forget that if you are lucky enough to live in an area where there is a NASS branch running then you too have access to regular physiotherapy. It may not be one to one but it will be run by a physiotherapist who has a special interest in AS and will always, I'm sure be very happy to talk to you after a session and offer advice on any problems you might have.

*Claire Harris
Physiotherapist*



Fight Back DVD now available

The NASS exercise DVD 'Fight Back Round 2' is now available once again in the NASS shop*. To order your copy for just £5 visit www.nass.co.uk/shop or call 020 8948 9117. Fightback was put together by some of the top physiotherapy advisors in the UK and includes 6 exercise programmes of varying length and difficulty and 35 individual exercises including hip safe exercises. This is ideal for exercising in your own home and is best suited to those with more advanced AS.

**Please note that this is not a new version of the DVD and is the same as the version produced in 2008.*