

What Is Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS)?

Ankylosing spondylitis (AN-kil-ose-ing spon-dih-LIE-tiss) (AS) is a long-lasting disease of the spine and joints that causes pain, stiffness and swelling, and can cause permanent damage to the spine if not managed early.



Who gets AS?

- AS affects 0.5% of the population
- Affects 3 times more men than women
- Usually first appears between the ages of 20 and 30

Where AS strikes

- Lower back
- Spine
- Shoulders
- Hips

What AS feels like

- Lower-back pain and stiffness
- Feels worse in the morning
- Feels better with exercise
- Pain develops slowly and cannot be traced to a single event
- Late stage: The bones in your back may become permanently fused together and cause difficulty bending

How AS is diagnosed

Your doctor will base a diagnosis on:

- Symptoms
- Blood tests for genetic markers
- Imaging (such as X-ray and ultrasound)

AS can cause permanent fusion of the bones in your spine, making it difficult to move. If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of AS like those described above, under "What AS feels like," ask your doctor about seeing a rheumatologist, a specialist in arthritis.