

Your guide to contractures



What are
contractures?

What causes them?

What can we do about
them?



What is a contracture?

A contracture is a shortening or tightness of muscles, tendons, ligaments, or skin.

They can cause permanent changes to joint movement and make moving harder and more painful.

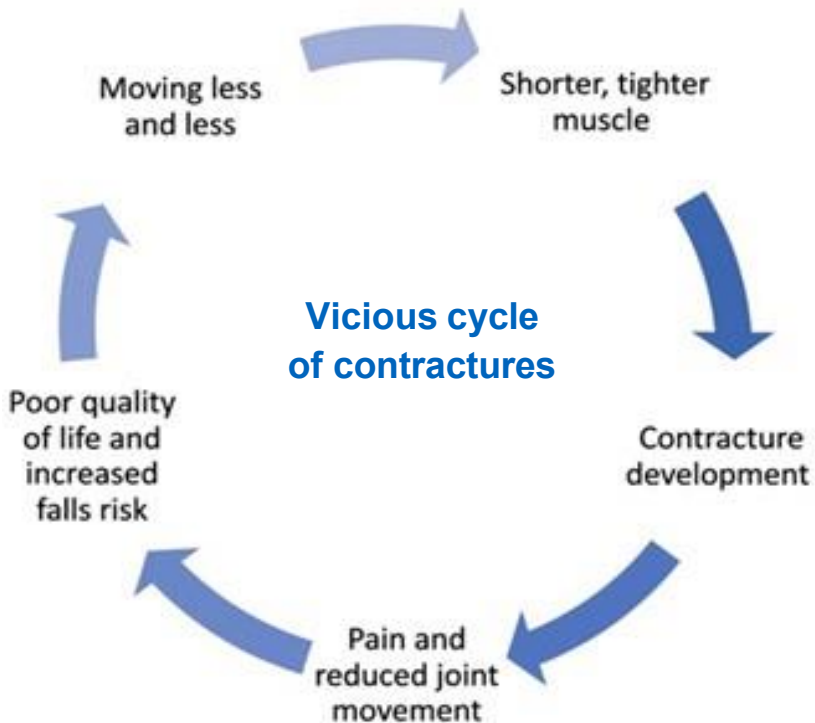
A contracture is not part of normal ageing.



- Posture - increasingly crooked.
- Movement of joints - a joint is stiff and less able to move.
- Function - certain tasks become harder.
- Pain - impacting movement and comfort.
- Care needs - unexplained long periods in bed, increased need of care.

What are the common causes of a contracture?

- Staying still for long periods.
- Muscle weakness preventing movement.
- Painful or movement-limiting illnesses.
- Poor bed and chair positioning.



Let's beat the cycle!

What are the risks?

- 1 Struggling with daily tasks.
- 2 Sudden and significant changes in ability to sit, walk and move.
- 3 Pain.
- 4 Muscle weakness.
- 5 Cognitive changes – including confusion, trouble concentrating, or memory loss.
- 6 Pressure ulcers – these are areas of damage to your skin and the tissue underneath. They are usually on bony parts of the body.
- 7 Decreased physical and mental stimulation in activities.

Increased risk of:	Struggle with:
Pressure ulcers	Washing and dressing
Pain	Eating
Frailty	Sitting
Low mood	Walking
Further loss of movement	Moving

A contracture has consequences; it will get worse if not managed.

How can the risk of a contracture be minimised?



Strength

Maintain strength with physical activity and exercise.



Treatment

Give treatment for pain, infection, dehydration, and malnutrition.



Opportunity

Give frequent opportunities to engage in physical and mental tasks and activities.



Positioning

Avoid long periods of lying in slumped, awkward or crooked positions.

Minimising the risk of a contracture can help to:

- Maintain your quality of life
- Reduce your need for care
- Increase your independence
- Improve your health and comfort.

What if I am worried about a contracture risk?

If you are worried about a contracture risk, please speak to your nurse or general practitioner (GP).

They can address medical concerns to do with pain management, dehydration, infection, and malnutrition.

A referral can be made to a physiotherapist or occupational therapist, where required.

They will make an assessment and a treatment plan if needed.



Visit YouTube to watch the Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust [video](#).

For impartial and confidential advice or information on the services provided by Bridgewater or to receive this leaflet in an alternative format call our Patient Services on 0800 587 0562.

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