

Exercise for people with arthritis

HOW DOES PHYSICAL ACTIVITY HELP IF YOU HAVE ARTHRITIS?

- Strength based exercise to strengthen muscles can help in reducing pain by helping to stabilise your joints.
- In addition to helping you increase the mobility and flexibility of your joints and reduce stiffness, exercise can also help you lose weight. This in turn relieves further strain on your joints.
- Exercise helps protect you against other conditions which cause ill health like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and some cancers.
- It helps strengthen your muscles and reduces your risk of falling.
- Physical activity, along with a healthy diet, helps reduce stress and improves your overall feeling of well-being and quality of life, as well as helping you to sleep well.

STAYING SAFE

It would be a good idea to either consult a physiotherapist or attend a specialist class so that you can get advice on what exercises will be of greatest help to you.

If you get any of the following problems stop and ask for medical advice from your GP or contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647:

- Discomfort in your chest or upper body
- Uncomfortable or severe breathlessness brought on by physical activity

- Dizziness or nausea on exertion
- Fainting during or just after doing exercise
- Palpitations (a very fast or irregular physical activity heart beat) during activity.

WHAT NEXT?

- Your GP or a physiotherapist at your local hospital may be able to advise you on local schemes for people with arthritis.
- If you have another medical condition like high blood pressure or diabetes, then a good source of information is the appropriate medical charity for your condition. Most of these charities offer specific exercise and lifestyle advice. Examples include the British Heart Foundation, Diabetes UK, Arthritis Research Campaign or Cancer Research UK.
- Local YMCA clubs or public gyms will offer a range of exercise opportunities, some of which may focus on specific age groups or medical conditions.

MORE INFORMATION

- Arthritis Care - Helpline 0808 800 4050 or www.arthritiscare.org.uk
- Arthritis Research Council - Helpline 01246 558033 or www.arc.org.uk
- EXTEND - holds group and individual exercise classes throughout the UK - telephone 01582 832760 or www.extend.org.uk

WHAT TYPE OF ACTIVITY IS BEST?

While stamina-based activity is important from a health point of view, if you have arthritis, some strength and flexibility-based activity is particularly important.

Stamina-type activities: Walking, cycling, swimming - swimming is particularly good as the warm water both supports your body weight and helps loosen up your joints

Strength-type activities: Walking uphill, carrying shopping, climbing stairs, gardening (digging or mowing) and housework. These exercises could involve moving your joints or could involve using resistance to tense the joint without actually moving it at all.

Balance-type activities: Dancing, yoga, T'ai Chi, Pilates and gardening - you may find it easier to sit down while you move your joints through their full range.

Tips on increasing your activity level

- Walking is an ideal activity as it's free and easy to do anywhere. You could take a dog for a walk or go with friends to make it more interesting, or you could use a pedometer to count your steps. Choose activities you enjoy.
- Try using the stairs instead of the escalator. If you do use the escalator, start by walking part of the way and gradually progress to walking up the whole way.

HOW MUCH AND HOW OFTEN?

Frequency

Your main aim is to try to build up to 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 or more days of the week but this will depend on your condition. You could spend 5-10 minutes on each exercise type (eg. stamina, strength and balance). One goal is to try and increase your activity by 1-2 minutes each day.

Intensity

Moderate intensity means breathing harder and getting warmer than normal. It does not need to be hard and it shouldn't cause you pain. You should be able to talk and be active at the same time.

Advice

Whatever your chosen activity, it should be performed at a gentle intensity which gradually increases. This gets the blood flowing to your muscles and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. When you are nearing the end of your activity you should also slowly decrease the level of activity over 5-10 minutes to allow your heart rate to slow down gradually. It is good to do some walking or swimming first before moving to the strengthening and flexibility exercises as this will help your body and joints to loosen up.

Remember

Set yourself realistic goals and don't worry if you miss one day. Just make sure that the next day you pick up where you left off.