

Exercise in Arthritis



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- Physically active individuals are healthier, happier & live longer than those who are inactive.
- Yet, arthritis is one of the most common reasons people give for limiting physical activity.
- Decreased pain tolerance, stiff joints & poor balance can become worse by inactivity.
- Therefore, for the person with arthritis, the right kind of exercise is very important.



Who should Exercise ?

- Everyone! People with arthritis can participate safely in appropriate, regular exercise.
- Studies quote, people with RA can benefit from moderate intensity, weight-bearing activity.
- Research suggests, people with OA should follow programs that combine strengthening, stretching & aerobic exercise.
- They improve joint motion & function, enhance coordination & balance and control body weight.
- Regular moderate exercise is said to improve cartilage health in individuals at risk for developing knee OA.



What Exercises are best ?

- 4 types of exercise that make up all exercise programs, regardless of the level of participation.

Flexibility Exercises

- Both Active Range-of-Motion (AROM) & Stretching Exercises improve flexibility in affected joints.
- This contributes to better posture, reduced risk of injuries & improved function.
- AROM Exercises: 5-10 repetitions daily.
- Stretching Exercises: at least 4-5 days a week (each stretch to be held for 10-15 seconds)
- Eg. Recreational activities such as Yoga, Tennis, Golfing & Tai Chi.



Strengthening Exercises

- These more vigorous exercises are designed to work muscles a bit harder helping reduce bone loss
- One set of 8-10 exercises for the major muscle groups of the body (4-5 times a week)
 - Most persons should complete 8-10 repetitions of each exercise.
 - Older individuals may find that 10-15 repetitions with less resistance are more appropriate.
- The resistance or weight needs to be of sufficient intensity to challenge the muscles without increasing joint pain.
- Resistance can take the form of lifting a limb against gravity, using hand-held weights or elastic bands, or pushing/pulling against resistance using a weight machine.



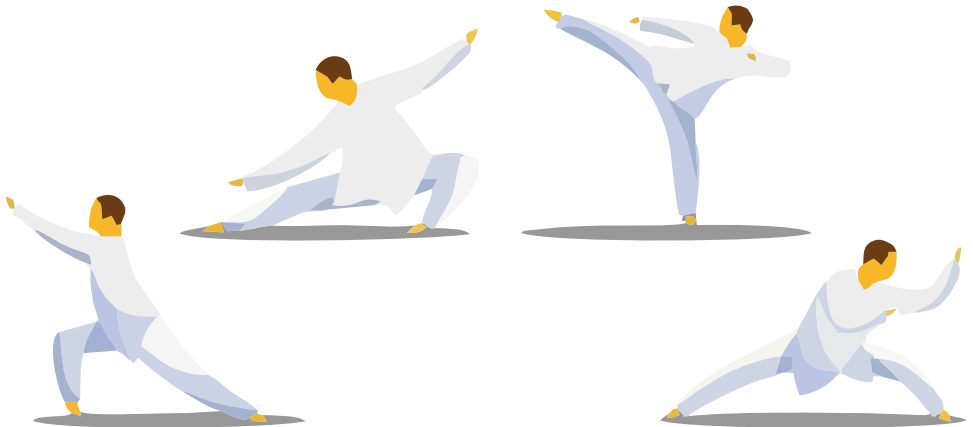
Aerobic Exercises

- Aerobic exercises in people with arthritis, have benefits for weight control, mood, sleep & general health.
- Safe forms include walking, aerobic dance, aquatic exercise, bicycling or exercising on equipment such as stationary bikes, treadmills, or elliptical trainers.
- WHO recommends, adults (18-64) perform 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise each week, preferably spread out over several days.
- Individuals with greater pain & fatigue to do shorter sessions within their personal tolerance level.



Body Awareness Exercises

- Less recognized, though very important exercises referred as Body Awareness Exercises.
- Include activities to improve posture, balance, joint position sense, coordination & relaxation.
- Health professional experienced in arthritis exercise prescription can determine which of these exercises will help improve your overall functioning and reduce the risk of injury.



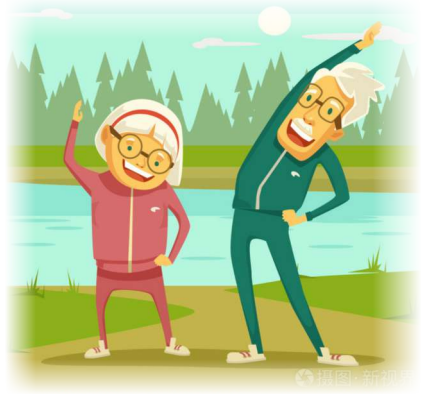
When to Exercise?

- For those with morning stiffness, gentle ROM exercises may be helpful, but getting to a fitness class may be too difficult.
- If fatigue is a problem, break up the exercise program into several short intervals during the day.
- Trouble sleeping at night? Avoid aerobic exercises within two hours of bedtime; however, stretching & relaxation exercises may help.
- It is important to be aware of any changes in your arthritis symptoms such as periods of more joint pain and stiffness. You may need more rest & less exercise during these times.



Where to Exercise?

- The best place to exercise is a personal choice.
- Some people prefer exercising at home while others enjoy getting out & attending a class or gym in the community.
- A community-based program offers greater options than exercising at home. Aquatic or pool-based exercise is another good option for people with arthritis.
- Arthritis Foundation's Take Control with Exercise (DVD) & Aquatic Program can be of great help.



How to get started?

- Starting a regular exercise program can be very challenging.
- Understanding the benefits, having support & guidance from your rheumatologist will help.
- Physical & Occupational Therapists can suggest exercises that are safe & customized to your specific needs.
- Make an exercise plan including when, how often and for how long you will exercise.
- Other tips to help you stay motivated are:
 - Set realistic short & long term goals, and reward yourself when you have achieved them.
 - Exercise with a friend or family member.
 - Keep an exercise log or chart your progress on a calendar.
 - Choose activities that are convenient, relatively inexpensive and fun!

- Discuss your exercise program & concerns with your rheumatology provider on regular basis.
- Their support & guidance, will help you reap the benefits of an active & healthy lifestyle.

LET'S

START



Reference:

Updated December 2020 by Robert W. Richardson, PT, FAPTA, and reviewed by the American College of Rheumatology Communications and Marketing Committee.

This information is provided for general education only. Individuals should consult a qualified health care provider for professional medical advice, diagnosis and treatment of a medical or health condition.



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