

Exercise:

For people with arthritis, exercise is especially advantageous in regard to the joints. Moving the joints daily helps to keep them fully mobile. Added joint support is achieved by strengthening the surrounding muscles. Also, joint movement transports nutrients and waste products to and from the cartilage, the material which protects the ends of the bones. The benefits of exercise include the following:

- Increases energy levels
- Helps develop a better sleep pattern
- Helps with weight control
- Maintains a healthy heart
- Increases bone and muscle strength
- Decreases depression and fatigue
- Serves to improve self-esteem and self-confidence

Exercise and Arthritis: Types of Exercise

Range-of-motion Exercises

Range-of-motion exercises are gentle stretching exercises which move each joint as far as possible in all directions. These exercises need to be done daily to help keep joints fully mobile and prevent stiffness and deformities. ROM (range-of-motion) exercises are especially important for arthritis patients, who because of intense inflammatory pain tend not to want to move painful joints. It is the notion of some people that normal daily activities take joints through their full range-of-motion but this is not the case. Normal daily activities, such as housework, dressing, bathing, and cooking, are not a substitute for ROM exercises.

Strengthening Exercises

Strengthening exercises help increase muscle strength. Strong muscles help to support the joints, making the joints more stable, and helping a person move more easily and with less pain. The two types of strengthening exercises are isometric and isotonic.

Isometric exercises involve tightening the muscles, without moving the joints. These exercises are especially useful when joint motion is impaired.

Isotonic exercises involve strengthening the muscles by moving the joints.

Endurance Exercises

Endurance exercises are physical activities that bring your heart rate up to your optimal target level for at least twenty to thirty minutes. The target heart rate is computed based on age and physical condition. These exercises, by raising the heart rate, improve cardiovascular fitness. These exercises should be performed at least three times a week to enhance effectiveness. Many arthritis patients who do endurance exercises:

- Increase physical strength
- Develop a better mental attitude
- Improve arthritis symptoms

Not all arthritis patients are able to perform endurance exercises however. For example, patients with long-term rheumatoid arthritis and left with functional limitations will be unable to do this type of activity. Endurance exercises for arthritis patients need to be chosen carefully to avoid joint injury.

Exercise Choices

People with arthritis should always discuss their exercise plans with a doctor. There may be many exercises that are off-limits for people with a particular type of arthritis or when joints are swollen and inflamed. The amount and form of exercise recommended for each individual will vary depending on:

- Type of arthritis
- Joints involved
- Levels of inflammation
- Stability of joints
- Joint replacements
- Other limitations

Exercise choices for people with arthritis may include:

Walking - Walking can be an excellent exercise choice. Walking helps build strength and maintain joint flexibility, aids in bone health and reduces the risk of osteoporosis.

Tai Chi - The practice of Tai Chi is a gentle martial arts exercise with origins in ancient China. While performing fluid and flowing circular movements, those with arthritis can relax, maintain mobility and improve range of motion.

Yoga - Yoga can provide pain relief, relax stiff muscles and ease sore joints. Yoga with it's controlled movements, pressures, stretches and deep breathing relaxation, can also provide needed range of motion exercise. Use caution when disease activity is flaring and avoid excess torque or pressure on the joints.

Water exercises / Swimming - Warm water exercise is an excellent way for those with arthritis to build up strength, ease stiff joints and relax sore muscles. The water helps support the body while the joints are moved through the full range-of-motion. The buoyancy of the water places less stress on the hips, knees, and spine.

Bicycling / Cycling - Cycling, both indoor and outdoor, may provide a good low impact exercise option. Cycling as an exercise, can be either freestanding or stationary. Cycling equipment can be adjusted and adapted for many of the limitations imposed by arthritis.

Running / Jogging - Running may still be good exercise for those with arthritis if they run on softer surfaces. Walking or more gentle forms of exercise may be a better option for people with arthritis in their lower extremities. Research indicates, contrary to popular belief, that running does not cause osteoarthritis in those with normal, uninjured knees.