

Exercise and Arthritis

Staying active is one of the best ways to ease arthritis pain and keep your joints flexible. Even a little movement every day can have big benefits, including:

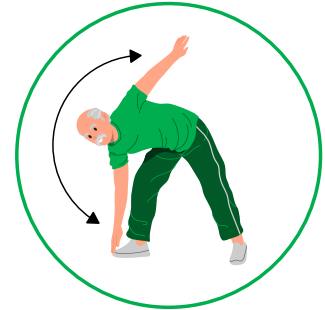
- Reducing stiffness and keeping joints flexible
- Strengthening muscles around joints to help support them
- Keeping bones strong
- Remaining active and independent.

Being physically active can also help improve your mood, increase your energy, help you sleep better, help you lose weight and strengthen your heart.

Types of Exercise

People with arthritis can benefit from a variety of physical activities:

- **“Range of motion” exercises for flexibility.** “Range of motion” means how far you can move your joints in all directions. These include gentle stretching and bending. Doing these regularly can help maintain and improve your flexibility.
- **Aerobic/endurance exercises.** These exercises, which make you breathe heavily, strengthen your heart and make your lungs more efficient. When you do them regularly, they reduce fatigue and build stamina. Aerobic exercise also burns calories and can help you control your weight. These exercises include brisk walking, jogging, bicycling, swimming or using an elliptical machine.
- **Strengthening exercises.** These help maintain and improve your strength. Strong muscles support and protect joints. Using hand weights, weight machines and resistance bands are all ways to strengthen muscles. You can also substitute with household items like water bottles or soup cans.
- **Aim to do range-of-motion and aerobic exercises** every day and strengthening exercises every other day. Walking, biking, yoga, tai chi and water-based exercises are all good choices for arthritis. All types of physical activities are beneficial. From household chores to gardening, washing your car or playing with children, there are many ways to move for better health.



Range of Motion



Light Hand Weights



Walking

For More Information

Exercises for Arthritis

arthritis.org/exercise

Walk With Ease

arthritis.org/WWE

Your Exercise Solution

arthritis.org/YEStool

EXERCISE RECOMMENDATION

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends 150 minutes every week of moderately intense aerobic exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic exercise.

For example, you can take a 30-minute fast walk or bike ride five times per week. Or you can jog, swim or bike — so your heart is pumping for 25 minutes — three times per week, plus stretching every day and doing strengthening exercises every other day.

Starting an Exercise Program

Before you start an exercise routine, let your doctor know you're planning to get more active. They can help you avoid exercises that might be harmful based on your medical condition.

Once you're ready to begin, start small. Try three 10-minute rounds throughout the day. That still counts as 30 minutes of exercise. Every minute counts. Do what you can now and work up to at least 150 minutes of moderately intense or 75 minutes of intense exercise per week. You might need to try it at different times of the day to see what works best for you. There may be a time of the day when you're feeling less pain and stiffness and when you have time to exercise. Try range-of-motion exercises in the morning to ease morning stiffness. Avoid aerobic exercise too close to bedtime because it could make it hard to fall asleep.

In the first few weeks of exercising, you may notice that your heart beats faster and you breathe faster. That's because your heart and lungs are being pushed in new ways. Your muscles may feel tight, and you may feel tired at night but wake up feeling refreshed in the morning.

Importance of Warm-Up and Cool-Down Exercises

No matter what exercise you're doing, be sure to take five to 15 minutes to warm up first and to cool down afterwards to help prevent injuries. Follow these steps before and after:

- Walk slowly for a few minutes or do a slow version of the activity you plan to do (like slow squats or march in place).
- Stretch gently so you move your joints as far as they can go in each direction. When cooling down, hold each stretch for five seconds and relax.
- Stretch all your muscles, especially the ones you're about to exercise.
- Do gentle stretches; they shouldn't hurt.

FAQs

How do I know if the pain from working out is normal?

Muscle soreness after a workout is typical. But if pain continues for a couple of hours, you might be doing a move incorrectly or putting too much stress on your joints. Contact your doctor if you experience pain that's sharp or worse than usual. Get medical help if you feel tightness in your chest or you're severely short of breath. Also get help if you feel dizzy, faint or sick to your stomach.

It's been so long since I've exercised. How can I start?

It's normal to feel worried about anything you haven't done in a while. But exercise isn't a competition. It's for your health and well-being. Do what you can. Celebrate each accomplishment to help boost your confidence and keep you going.

I do a lot of sports. What's recommended now that I have arthritis?

Having arthritis doesn't have to mean intense, high-impact activities are off limits, especially if your arthritis is under control. But you should choose a sport that doesn't put a lot of stress on your joints. Your doctor might be able to suggest which activities are a good fit for you.