

# Inflammatory Arthritis Education Series

## Exercise and Arthritis

This program has been reviewed and endorsed by



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**CAPA** Canadian Arthritis  
Patient Alliance  
experience · perspective · voice



# Objectives

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By the end of the session you will:

- Understand the role of exercise in helping to manage your arthritis and reduce your pain
- Be aware of some exercises that may suit you
- Learn about some basic exercises that can be performed at home or work to help reduce pain / stress

# Introduction to Exercise

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- Exercise is a way to actively manage your disease and is part of your treatment program
- Exercise helps “feed” joints
  - Cartilage depends on joint movement to absorb nutrients and remove waste
- Exercise can play a role in improving overall health, fitness, and balance, as well as reducing pain and stress.
- Check with your healthcare provider to make sure your exercise program is appropriate

# Choosing Your Exercise

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- Choose to exercise in settings you enjoy
- Start with an individualized program at a level that is right for you and gradually build your tolerance / endurance
- Programs focused on exercise goals are more likely to be sustained over time
- Research resources in your community
  - Exercise classes
  - Facilities
  - Activity groups

# Basic Exercise Guidelines

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- Plan to exercise at a time when you feel best during the day when:
  - you have more energy and less stiffness and swelling
  - your regular medications are most effective at controlling your disease
- More exercise is not necessarily better
  - Find your baseline (e.g. how long can you walk without flaring?)
  - Slow and steady may be best
- Plan to exercise at a time when you feel best during the day
- Take rest breaks as needed throughout the day to balance for increased activity

# Basic Exercise Guidelines

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- For cardiovascular health, 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic exercise is recommended per week
  - Can be done in blocks of 10 minutes or more
  - Moderate = brisk walking
- Perform strengthening exercises at least 2 days a week
- Exercise should not be painful - if a joint is particularly sore:
  - Reduce exercises for that joint to gentle range-of-motion movements and fewer repetitions
  - Apply ice before and after exercise if joints are inflamed
  - Warm shower before exercise can help to reduce stiffness
- 2-hour pain rule
  - Muscle / joint pain that lasts for more than 2 hours signals a need to lower intensity or modify your exercise program

# Basic Exercise Guidelines

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- Plan to exercise when your normal regimen of arthritis medication is at its most effective for reducing pain
- Be aware that medications can mask pain

# Cross Training

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A comprehensive exercise program is made up of 5 types of exercise:

- Joint range-of-motion:
  - Daily when inflammation and pain is least
  - 3 to 4 repetitions of moderate stretch in joints
- Flexibility – muscle stretching
  - Gentle feeling of stretch in muscle, not pain
  - Hold for 10 to 30 seconds, 2 to 4 repetitions, 2 to 3 days per week
- Muscle strengthening – joint stability
  - Enough resistance to fatigue at 8 to 15 repetitions, 2 to 3 sessions per week
  - Use own body weight, resistance bands, weights
- Endurance - cardiovascular fitness
  - 3 to 5 days per week, 30 to 40 minutes per day
  - Examples: pool exercise, walking, dancing, etc.
- Body-awareness - balance, posture, breathing
  - 2 to 3 days per week, 20 to 30 minutes per day
  - Examples: yoga, tai chi, balance training

# Top 10 Workplace Exercises

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For all of the following exercises, consult your healthcare provider about how often to do them, number of repetitions, length of time, etc.

## 1. Ankle circles

- Sit upright in chair with feet stretched out in front. Circle feet in one direction and repeat in other direction.

## 2. Heel/toe lift

- Sit forward on chair with feet flat. Lift heels, keeping toes on floor, then lift toes. Hold then return flat. Repeat.

## 3. Knee raises

- Sit on edge of chair with back straight. Lift knee as high as you can without bending your back. You can assist knee higher with hands. Keep abdominals tight and slowly lower leg back to starting position.

# Top 10 Workplace Exercises

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## 4. Leg lift with ankle movements

- Sit upright with back supported. Slowly straighten knee. With knee slightly bent, bend ankle (toes pointing straight ahead). Then reverse to point toes toward ceiling. Repeat.

## 5. Shoulder stretches

- Sit or stand with forearms pressed together in front of the body. Then bring your elbows back to the “hands up” position, with palms facing forward. Stretch arms over head as far as possible, keeping elbows in line with side of body.

## 6. Forward arm reaches

- Sit or stand with arms at your side, with elbows bent and thumbs pointing back toward shoulders. Stretch arms over head. If one arm is weak, you can help it by placing your hand under the elbow and assisting to arm to the overhead position. Finally, lower arms slowly to start position.

# Top 10 Workplace Exercises

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## 7. Shoulder squeeze and wrist stretch

- Put palms and fingers together. Hold arms stretched out together in front. Pull hands in toward your chest, making your elbows bend to each side. Press palms together as you move them closer to your body and squeeze shoulder blades together.

## 8. Finger walk and thumb circles

- Sit with hands on table, fingers pointing ahead. Slide thumbs toward each other, then slide each finger one at a time toward the thumb. After the little finger has completed the “walk,” lift your hands and put them down straight. Then, move your fingers toward the thumb. Move the thumb in a large circle in each direction.

# Top 10 Workplace Exercises

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## 9. Hip and calf stretch

- Stand with arm support against a wall. Place one foot in front of the other and keep your feet apart (shoulder width) and pointing forward. Keep your shoulder, hip, knee and ankle in a straight line. Keep shoulder and hips square and tighten abdominal muscles. Move forward, bending only at the ankles and keeping weight on heel of back foot.

## 10. Walking

- Take a walk every day. Walking allows you to stretch your back and leg muscles and joints that can become stiff from sitting.

# Beginner's Checklist for Exercise

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- ✓ You've got your doctor's okay to start endurance exercising, and have consulted your physiotherapist (especially if you have joint deformity, significant pain and muscle weakness, or have recently undergone joint surgery)
- ✓ You know that “slow and steady, and regular exercise” is the best strategy for long-term gains, as is setting yourself performance objectives to know when to progress with your program
- ✓ You have an idea of how much time to devote to exercising and when in your schedule you can fit it in
- ✓ You know to respect the “2-hour Pain Rule” and to balance increased activity with rest periods during the day
- ✓ You've been warned that you may feel increased pain and stiffness at first, but that it will soon disappear
- ✓ You've made a list of fitness activities that you'd really like to do, and researched local programs/groups/community resources
- ✓ You are familiar with the range-of-motion, stretching and strengthening exercises that best suit you

# Key Messages

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- Exercise is important to help reduce pain, increase flexibility and actively manage your disease
- It's something you can do to help you actively manage and feel in control of your arthritis
- Create a routine that best suits your needs
- Remember the 5 basic types of exercises:
  - Range of motion
  - Stretching
  - Strengthening
  - Endurance
  - Body awareness

# Resources

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- Arthritis Consumer Experts [www.jointhehealth.org](http://www.jointhehealth.org)
- The Arthritis Foundation [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)
- The Arthritis Society [www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca)
- Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance [www.arthritispatient.ca](http://www.arthritispatient.ca)
- Canadian Psoriasis Network [www.cpn-rcp.com](http://www.cpn-rcp.com)
- Canadian Spondylitis Association [www.spondylitis.ca](http://www.spondylitis.ca)
- Rheuminfo [www.rheuminfo.com](http://www.rheuminfo.com)
- Canadian Medical Association [www.cma.ca](http://www.cma.ca)
- Canadian Nurses Association [www.cna-nurses.ca/cna](http://www.cna-nurses.ca/cna)
- Canadian Assoc. of Occupational Therapists [www.caot.ca](http://www.caot.ca)
- Canadian Physiotherapy Association [www.thesehands.ca](http://www.thesehands.ca)
- Dietitians of Canada [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)

# Resources

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- The Canadian Pain Coalition [www.thecanadianpaincoalition.ca](http://www.thecanadianpaincoalition.ca)
- The Canadian Pain Society [www.painexplained.ca](http://www.painexplained.ca)
- International Association for the Study of Pain [www.iasp-pain.org](http://www.iasp-pain.org)
- Neil Pearson's Patient Education [www.lifeisnow.ca](http://www.lifeisnow.ca)
- The Calgary Pain Centre – online lecture series [www.calgaryhealthregion.ca](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca)
- Pain toolkit [www.paintoolkit.org](http://www.paintoolkit.org)
- Sleep Foundation [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

# Resources

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- Lorig K, Fries J. The Arthritis Helpbook: A Tested Self-management Program for Coping with Arthritis and Fibromyalgia. Fifth edition. Perseus Books, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000.
- Ellert G. The Arthritis Exercise Book: Gentle, Joint-by-Joint Exercises to Keep You Flexible and Independent. Contemporary Books, Lincolnwood, Illinois, 1990.