

Inflammatory Arthritis Education Series

Exercise and Arthritis

This program has been reviewed and endorsed by



Canadian Arthritis
Patient Alliance

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all content was developed independently by
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Objectives

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

Exercise:

is a way to actively manage your disease and is part of your treatment program

helps “feed” joints, that is, cartilage depends on joint movement to absorb nutrients and remove waste

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

Exercise may be targeted to joint health and protection, as well as the usual goals of cardiac health or strengthening

Choosing Your Exercise

Choose to exercise in settings you enjoy

Start with an individualized program, developed for your arthritis care, 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*

** Always ensure that when participating in groups that the exercises are appropriate for your needs*

Basic Exercise Guidelines

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

Take rest breaks as needed throughout the day to balance for increased activity

Basic Exercise Guidelines

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

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

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

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

Ankle circles

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

Heel/toe lift

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

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

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.

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

- ✓ 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

- Exercise is important to help reduce pain, increase flexibility and actively manage your disease
- Exercise is 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:
 1. Range of motion
 2. Stretching
 3. Strengthening
 4. Endurance
 5. Body awareness

Resources

Arthritis Consumer Experts

www.jointhehealth.org

The Arthritis Foundation

www.arthritis.org

The Arthritis Society

www.arthritis.ca

Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance

www.arthritispatient.ca

Canadian Psoriasis Network

www.cpn-rcp.com

Canadian Spondylitis Association

www.spondylitis.ca

Rheuminfo

www.rheuminfo.com

Canadian Medical Association

www.cma.ca

Canadian Nurses Association

www.cna-nurses.ca/cna

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists

www.caot.ca

Canadian Physiotherapy Association

www.thesehands.ca

Dietitians of Canada

www.dietitians.ca

Resources

- 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.