

## **Creating a Program to Manage Tiredness in Rheumatoid Arthritis Using Physical Activity**

### **Summary:**

We created a new program using physical activity to combat fatigue or tiredness. This program was based on a combination of a) input from people living with rheumatoid arthritis, b) what we learned from past research, and c) input from health care professionals working with arthritis.

### **Why we did this:**

Fatigue is a very common side effect of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) that can impact almost every part of a person's life. Some research suggests physical activity (PA) may decrease tiredness in people with RA. If we can teach people safe ways to be physically active, we can give them the power to improve their own lives. Currently, there is very little research looking at fatigue or using self-management to improve tiredness in RA. We wanted to be sure that PA can improve fatigue for people with RA. To test this idea, we created a program that therapists can use to teach people with RA how to safely be active.

### **What we created:**

Our program is 12-weeks long, with 7 in-person group sessions led by a physiotherapist. Each session has 2 parts: 1) education and questions, then 2) time for everyone to complete an activity of their choice. During the active part, all choices are made by the person, such as making a task harder. The goal of this program is to build a person's confidence in doing PA on their own.

### **How we designed it:**

We used guidelines released by the UK Medical Research Council and proven ways to build new habits to help create a self-management PA program. To design this program, there were 3 stages. First, we tried to decide which programs work best, by finding all studies on PA and fatigue. Second, we read different ideas on how people can change their behaviour. Here we learned what our program should target, to change someone's PA habits. Lastly, we wanted to consider how people with RA might feel about physical activity. To do this, we met with people who have fatigue from RA and therapists working with RA. We combined what we learned from all stages to help design our program.

**Next steps:**

In the end, we had a program based on real-life experience and research. Now this program needs to be tested to ensure it works well. Future studies should look at short and long-term changes to fatigue with PA and if this program can be used in other settings.

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