

Exercising with Arthritis

There are two common forms of Arthritis:

RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS - acute inflammation of a joint

OSTEOARTHRITIS - chronic, progressive, degenerative joint disease

Warning signs to look out for:

- Persistent pain and stiffness after getting up in the morning (particularly in the neck, lower back, knees, wrists and hands)
- Abnormal pain, tenderness or swelling in any joint accompanied by fatigue, weight loss and fever

Benefits of Exercise Training for Arthritic Joints:

- Improves aerobic capacity
- Increases muscular strength and joint mobility
- Reduces joint pain
- Improves overall functioning of your body

Scheduling your exercise

Morning stiffness may be a problem for some people with arthritis, so scheduling your exercise sessions for late morning or early afternoon is a good option. Joints may flare up during periods of high humidity so try to exercise in a controlled environment where possible.

The 2 Hour Pain Rule

An increase in pain after activity that lasts more than 2 hours suggests that you need to alter your exercise regime. If you find that there is an increase in symptoms with exercise, you may need to reduce the frequency, intensity, time duration or type of exercise involving the affected joints.

EXERCISE GUIDELINES – according to the FITT Principle

Frequency: Aim to exercise 4-5 times per week wherever possible. If exercise is new to you, try starting with 2 sessions per week and build from there.

Intensity: Day-to-day changes in how you're feeling may limit your exercise intensity. Rely on the RPE scale (11-14 is ideal) along with the Target Heart Rate individually prescribed for you. Make sure you can talk during exercise!

Time: Aim to exercise for a minimum of 30 minutes. You may need to break this down into 3 x 10 minute sessions to prevent joint discomfort.

Type: Walking, Stationary or Recumbant Cycling, Swimming and other aquatic activities are the best options.

Resistance training is especially important for arthritic joints as it can help by enhancing and maintaining muscular strength. By strengthening the muscles surrounding your joints, you can reduce pain and stiffness in conjunction with improved joint support and stability, mobility, balance, gait and physical function. Most importantly, strong muscles help to absorb shock and support the joints during movement.

** The key to exercise for arthritic conditions is to manipulate the intensity and duration of aerobic exercise to achieve a training effect without causing joint discomfort! Therefore it may be necessary to carry out interval or cross training to maximize exercise performance and to minimize joint aggravation. You can do this by alternating between lighter and harder work intervals or by walking/cycling with light resistance exercises in between.