

EXERCISING WITH ARTHRITIS



An estimated 40 million people have some form of arthritis. The two most common forms are osteoarthritis, a degenerative joint disease characterized by a progressive loss of cartilage, and rheumatoid arthritis, a chronic condition causing the lining of the joints to become inflamed. Both conditions can make exercise a difficult and painful proposition. However, a well-designed physical activity program can decrease joint swelling and pain and improve overall function. Furthermore, regular exercise can help you maintain a healthy weight (which reduces pressure on your joints) and improve cartilage and bone tissue health. The key is to keep yourself active in a variety of ways, and you will be on your way to greater mobility and better health.

Getting Started

- Talk with your health care practitioner before starting an exercise program and ask for specific programming recommendations and possible changes to your medications.
 - Select low-impact and non-impact activities such as walking, swimming, water exercise and cycling.
 - An extended warm-up and a gradual cool-down may help reduce the likelihood of aggravating joint pain.
 - Spread your activity throughout the day (e.g., three 10-minute sessions). Set time goals rather than distance goals.
 - Start slowly and gradually progress the intensity and duration of your workouts. Take frequent breaks during activity if needed.
 - Select shoes and insoles for maximum shock absorption.
- Be prepared to adjust your workouts according to fluctuations in your symptoms.

Exercise Cautions

- Avoid overstretching.
- Some discomfort after your workouts is to be expected, but you should not be in pain.
- Avoid vigorous, highly repetitive activities, particularly if your joints are unstable.
- If you have arthritis in your feet, consult with your physician or podiatrist before doing high-impact activities such as running.

Your exercise program should be modified to maximize the benefits while minimizing the risk of aggravating your health condition. Consider contacting an ACSM-certified fitness professional* who can work with you and your healthcare practitioner to establish realistic goals and design a safe and effective program that addresses your specific needs.

IN THE SERIES:

- > Cardiovascular Diseases
- > Pulmonary Diseases
- > Metabolic Diseases
- > Immunological/Hematological Disorders
- > Orthopedic Diseases and Disabilities
- > Neuromuscular Disorders

*If your health care provider has not cleared you for independent physical activity and would like you to be monitored in a hospital setting or a medical fitness facility, you should exercise only under the supervision of a certified professional. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) has two groups of certified fitness professionals that could meet your needs. The ACSM Certified Clinical Exercise Specialist (CES) is certified to support those with heart disease, diabetes and lung disease. The ACSM Registered Clinical Exercise Physiologist (RCEP) is qualified to support patients with a wide range of health challenges. You may locate all ACSM-certified fitness professionals by using the ProFinder at www.acsm.org.

For more information, visit www.exerciseismedicine.org or e-mail eim@acsm.org.

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