

Being Active When You Have Osteoarthritis

Exercise
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Being active will help you feel better, move better and sleep better. Experts now say that any physical activity counts toward better health — even just a few minutes!

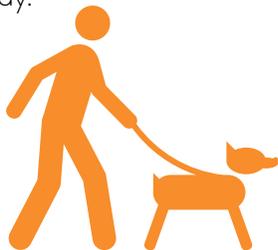
If you are one of the millions of people who have osteoarthritis (OA), being active is an important way to decrease the pain and stiffness that are hallmarks of arthritis. If you avoid physical activity, you'll get weaker and stiffer, making your joint pain and disability worse. Regular exercise has been shown to reduce pain, improve your ability to do daily activities and lower your risk of other health problems.

Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.

Getting Started

Keep It Simple

Sit less and move around more! Sitting still for too long will cause your joints to feel stiff. Walk to the mailbox. Walk the dog. Dance in the kitchen. Take the stairs. Find opportunities to move throughout your day.



Talk with Your Doctor

If you have other health problems or have been inactive for a long time, check with your health care provider. How about physical therapy? Physical therapists can teach you exercises to strengthen and support your joints and manage pain.



Build A Plan

There is no one best way to be active with OA. Use your "likes" to guide your active lifestyle. What will help you make a change and get moving? Schedule activity as a high priority.



Be Active with A Friend

Find a friend and set up walking schedules or find out about programs in the community. Those who are active with a buddy tend to stick with it longer than those who go it alone.



Osteoarthritis Tips and Cautions

Start slowly. Try to be active when pain levels and stiffness are lowest. Increase your activity time or speed by no more than 10 percent each week.

We all make mistakes sometimes and pain increases. If you have a flare-up, swelling or increased pain and stiffness, do not stop all activity. Keep doing gentle joint movements while you recover. Then start back slightly below the level that caused the flare-up.

Decrease stress on your joints by losing weight. Even a 5 percent weight loss will boost the positive effects of physical activity. Every pound lost results in 4 pounds less weight (and stress) on the knee with each step. That feels good!

Determine what you need to get started, such as equipment, expert advice or a good place to be active. If you are going to start a walking program, get shoes that have good support and absorb shock. How about trekking poles for hiking?

You may experience some discomfort with activity, but that doesn't mean you're damaging your joints. If pain is greater for 2 hours after activity than it was before, go easier or shorter next time. If a specific exercise causes pain, find another one for the same area that works better.

Aerobic Activity



Aerobic activity increases your heart rate and breathing and improves your stamina. Build up to doing at least 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity activity, 75 minutes of vigorous activity or a combination of both. Try low-impact options such as walking, cycling, elliptical training, rowing or exercising in a warm water pool.

What?

Any continuous, rhythmic activity with low joint stress



How often?

3 to 5 days/week



How hard?

Start fairly light. Build up to somewhat hard.



How much?

Begin w/ a few minutes. Gradually build up to 30 or more minutes over the day.



Remember: Set goals by time rather than distance. Fit in 5 or 10 minutes here and there. Or go for 20 to 30 minutes. Be active however and wherever you can. It all adds up. To lose weight, do twice as much activity and reduce your calories by eating healthy foods.

Aerobic Activity Tips and Cautions

- A few short sessions may be easier on your joints than one long session. Reduce repetitive joint stress by doing different types of aerobic activity in the same session or over the week. It's more fun!
- Warm up and cool down at an easy pace for 5 to 10 minutes to ease your joints in and out of more vigorous exercise.
- If your knees "give way," try activities that are less weight-bearing, such as cycling. Ask your health care provider about help for this, such as a brace.
- Be active in warm water (water exercise or swimming) to take weight off of painful joints as you move. Walking at a moderate or brisk pace in shallow water builds stamina, coordination, balance and lower body strength. Check your posture (stand tall) and push and pull with your hands.

Strength Training



Strength training is an important part of a program for those with arthritis. Strength training helps reverse muscle loss that occurs with arthritis, can decrease pain and improves your ability to do recreational and daily activities. Increasing strength in the muscles above and below your affected joint can help.

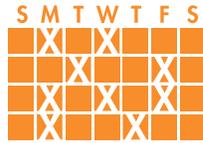
What?

Hand weights, resistance bands, weight machines or your own body (for example, wall push-ups or sit-to-stands).



How often?

2 to 3 days/week
*Rest day rest in between



How hard?

Start with light effort or just below a level that would cause prolonged pain. Build up to medium or hard effort.



How much?

10 to 15 repetitions to start (for each major muscle group). Build up to 8-12 reps of more challenging effort. Repeat 2 to 4 times.



Remember: If you need it, get help from a licensed physical therapist or certified exercise professional. They can teach you the right way to do exercises and how to breathe properly.

Strength Training Cautions

- If you have pain during an exercise, lower the resistance, use a different position or grip, do fewer repetitions or try a different exercise.
- Some parts of an exercise may be more or less comfortable as you move. To start, focus your movement in the ranges that are more comfortable. Gradually add more range as your pain lessens and you get stronger.
- Splitting your aerobic activity into two shorter sessions before and after your strength exercises can reduce the chance for flare-ups.

Flexibility



Arthritis can limit your flexibility, so exercises to keep your joints from getting stiff are important. There are two kinds of flexibility exercises, static stretching and moving a joint through its full range of motion (ROM) as much as possible, for example, wrist circles and heel slides when lying down. Motion is the lotion of a joint!

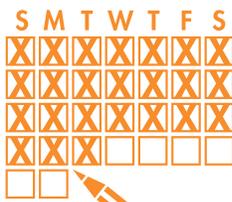
What?

Range of motion (ROM) exercises and stretching



How often?

Daily and during cool down.



How hard?

Gently move your joints around as much as you can. Stretch to the point of feeling tightness, but not pain.



How much?

10 repetitions of active ROM exercises for your affected joints. Hold static stretches for 10-30 seconds (30-60 seconds for older adults).



Other Types of Physical Activity



Aerobic activity, strength training and flexibility are at the heart of a program for those with osteoarthritis. You will also benefit from these other options.

Yoga, Pilates, Tai-Chi

All help improve strength, flexibility and balance. They also help you relax and reduce pain.



Balance

Practice simple balance exercises such as: Stand with your feet together. Stand heel-to-toe. Stand on a softer surface. Hold each position for 15-30 seconds. Walk on a line or on your toes. Stay close to a stable surface or wall for support if needed.



Take More Steps

Use a smart phone or activity tracker to measure your progress and stay motivated. Gradually build up to 7,000-9,000 steps per day.



Just for Fun

Find ways of being active that are just plain fun. Try pickleball. Dance. Tend your garden. Play outdoors with your kids or grandkids. Find what makes you smile and do it often.



More Help

For more information, visit the Arthritis Foundation (www.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/exercise) for updated guidance and more comprehensive exercise examples.

Go to www.acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro to find an **ACSM certified exercise professional** near you.

How will I get started **this week?** _____