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Get Moving: Arthritis and Exercise

Have you been diagnosed with arthritis or recently injured a joint? If so, now is the time to get moving. If you're tempted to tolerate the pain, or think arthritis is just part of growing older, it's time to re-evaluate your attitude toward arthritis.

Arthritis is one of the most common diseases in this country. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 21 million adults aged 65 and older are affected by arthritis. There are more than 100 different kinds of arthritis, with the most common among older adults being osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and gout.

Exercise is important for everyone, including people with arthritis. Studies have shown that exercise helps people with arthritis in many ways. Exercise reduces joint pain and stiffness and increases flexibility, muscle strength, cardiac fitness, and endurance. It also helps with weight reduction and contributes to an improved sense of well-being.

Three types of exercise are best for people with arthritis:

- **Range-of-motion exercises** (e.g., dance) help maintain normal joint movement and relieve stiffness. This type of exercise helps maintain or increase flexibility.
- **Strengthening exercises** (e.g., weight training) help keep or increase muscle strength. Strong muscles help support and protect joints affected by arthritis.
- **Aerobic or endurance exercises** (e.g., bicycle riding) improve cardiovascular fitness, help control weight, and improve overall function. Weight control can be important to people who have arthritis because extra weight puts extra pressure on many joints. Some studies show that aerobic exercise can reduce inflammation in some joints.



Before beginning any exercise program, individuals should check with their doctor or other health care provider. The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases offers the following tips to help get individuals started on the road to exercise:

- Discuss exercise plans with your doctor.
- Start with supervision from a physical therapist or qualified athletic trainer.
- Apply heat to sore joints (optional; many people with arthritis start their exercise program this way).
- Stretch and warm up with range-of-motion exercises.
- Start strengthening exercises slowly with small weights (a 1- or 2-pound weight can make a big difference).
- Progress slowly.
- Use cold packs after exercising (optional; many people with arthritis complete their exercise routine this way).
- Add aerobic exercise.
- Consider appropriate recreational exercise (after doing range-of-motion, strengthening, and aerobic exercise). Fewer injuries to joints affected by arthritis occur during recreational exercise if it is preceded by range-of-motion, strengthening, and aerobic exercise that gets your body in the best condition possible.
- Ease off if joints become painful, inflamed, or red, and work with your doctor to find the cause and eliminate it.
- Choose the exercise program you enjoy most and make it a habit.

As the nation celebrates Older Americans Month and National Arthritis Month learn more about exercise and arthritis by visiting the National Institutes of Health senior health website at <http://www.nih-seniorhealth.gov/>. The Arthritis Foundation has a number of exercise programs specifically designed for people with arthritis. You can contact them at www.arthritis.org or by calling 1-800-283-7800. This article was adapted from material prepared by the NIAMS.