

Exercising with arthritis: Improve your joint pain and stiffness

As you consider starting an exercise program, understand what's within your limits and what level of exercise is likely to give you results.

Exercise is critical for people with arthritis. It increases strength and flexibility, reduces joint pain and helps combat fatigue. Of course, when stiff and painful joints are already bogging you down, the thought of walking around the block or swimming a few laps might make you cringe.

You don't need to run a marathon or swim the pace of an Olympic competitor to help reduce the symptoms of your arthritis. Even moderate exercise can ease your pain and help you maintain a healthy weight. When arthritis threatens to immobilize you, exercise keeps you moving. Not convinced? Read on.

Why exercise is vital

Exercise can help you improve your health and fitness without hurting your joints. Along with your current treatment program, exercise can:

- Strengthen the muscles around your joints
- Help you maintain bone strength
- Give you more strength & energy to get through the day
- Make it easier to get a good night's sleep
- Help you control your weight
- Make you feel better about yourself and improve your sense of well-being

Though you might think exercise will aggravate your joint pain and stiffness, that's not the case. Lack of exercise actually can make your joints even more painful and stiff. That's because keeping your muscles and surrounding tissue strong is crucial to maintaining support for your bones. Not exercising weakens those supporting muscles, making your bones more prone to breaking.

Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, August 18, 2006, AR9.

Check with your doctor first

Talk to one of our clinic doctors or therapists about how exercise can fit into your current treatment plan. What types of exercises are best for you depends on your type of arthritis and which joints are involved. We can work with you to find the best exercise plan to give you the most benefit with the least aggravation of your joint pain.