

Should people with arthritis avoid exercise?

True or false: A person with arthritis shouldn't bother to exercise because it's too painful.

The answer is a resounding false. It's important to exercise within your limits when you have arthritis, as regular activity lubricates joints, strengthens muscles, and makes it easier to move.

If it's painful to climb a flight of stairs or walk a few blocks, the idea of more movement might not make sense. But if you already have some joint pain or stiffness caused by arthritis, a lack of exercise can make things worse.

Not exercising causes the muscles supporting your bones to become weak, placing more pressure on the joints. This makes movement even more painful.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that moderate physical activity can help:

- Decrease pain,
- Improve function,
- Boost your mood, and
- Improve your quality of life.

It's recommended that people with arthritis get at least 150 minutes of physical activity each week — the same amount suggested for all adults under the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.

These minutes of activity should be spread throughout the week, and short bouts of movement are fine. A few 10-minute walks each day bring health benefits.

It's normal to have some discomfort when you first start to move, as movement brings lubrication and circulation to joints and it takes a few minutes to warm up. Extreme joint pain after your workout likely indicates that you need to make your workout less intense or switch to a different activity, and severe joint pain during a workout is a signal to stop.

A doctor, physical therapist, or another health care provider can offer activity suggestions that are right for you. They can address any concerns about pain, and can help you design an exercise program if you're not sure where to start.

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Arthritis facts

- Arthritis often occurs in adults with heart disease or diabetes, and in people who are obese.
- Symptoms of arthritis include joint pain, aching, and stiffness, as well as swelling in or around the joints.
- Arthritis impacts almost a quarter of adults in the United States.
- Arthritis is responsible for \$81 billion in direct medical costs each year.
- 6 in 10 people with arthritis are between ages 18 and 64.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Walking, swimming, and biking are often recommended for people with arthritis. An exercise program may also include muscle-strengthening activities such as weight training or the use of resistance bands for balance.



Your community may offer programs such as Active Living Everyday (developed at the Cooper Institute) or Walk With Ease (developed by the Arthritis Foundation), which are recommended by the CDC. These programs offer group support and are designed to help improve the health of people with arthritis by making regular physical activity part of their lifestyle.

Additional Resources

Physical Activity Programs

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides information about physical activity programs for people with arthritis on this website.

<https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/interventions/physical-activity.html>

Self-Management Education

Information about educational programs for adults with arthritis is provided on this website from the CDC.

https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/interventions/self_manage.htm