



# Exercising with osteoarthritis

## Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

## How to get started

Regular exercise has been shown to help manage the symptoms of arthritis, improve joint pain, muscle strength and overall joint function. It has also been shown to help maintain a healthy weight, which can alleviate joint problems. Exercise also helps improve posture, improve mobility, relieve depression and reduce the risk of developing osteoporosis.

Exercise reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke, lung disease, type-2 diabetes, high blood pressure and osteoporosis.

Plan your exercise activity to ensure you get maximum benefit from each type of exercise. If you have had a surgery, have arthritis in your feet, type 2 diabetes or are at risk of osteoporosis, speak to your doctor or healthcare provider about ways you can safely and effectively exercise, especially with regard to balance exercises.

**Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.**

## Warm up and cool down

**Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely.** Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

**Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely.** Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

## Be active

### Some is good, more is better

<b>How much:</b>	Aim for at least <b>150-300</b> minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least <b>75-150</b> minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve.
<b>How hard:</b>	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary. Expect some discomfort but not pain after your workout. Be prepared to modify your exercise plan to suit your health needs.
<b>How long:</b>	Aim to spread out sessions throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10 minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer.

<b>What type:</b>	All physical activity counts. Try low- and non-impact activities on softer surfaces such as walking, nordic walking, swimming, dancing, cycling and water aerobics. Household activities such as gardening are great activities for your health.
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### What will it do for me?

*Regular exercise significantly reduces the risks of long-term health conditions and helps with maintaining a healthy weight. Improved physical fitness and weight control results in pain reduction and less joint deterioration, thereby helping you enjoy the activities of daily living.*

## Build strength

<b>How much:</b>	At least twice a week, unless severe pain or swelling is present.
<b>How hard:</b>	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time. Ensure correct technique to avoid muscle tears, further pain and joint swelling. Strengthening exercises should not result in an increase in your arthritis pain that lasts more than 2 hours after exercise.
<b>How long:</b>	Choose 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Try 1 set and progress to 3 sets, if the joint continues to be pain-free, and your strength improves.
<b>What type:</b>	A variety of strength exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a can of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight. Try backwards shoulder press, leg push, chest press, leg press, assisted planks.

### What will it do for me?

*Strength exercises decrease stiffness and increase or maintain pain-free movement. They also improve mobility and help reduce symptoms such as muscle weakness and joint instability.*

## Improve balance

<b>How much:</b>	At least three days a week.
<b>How hard:</b>	Choose 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Complete 1–3 sets of each exercise.
<b>How long:</b>	Hold each balance exercise for 10-30 seconds.
<b>What type:</b>	Try yoga, Tai Chi, or simple home balance exercises. Balance exercise can be done standing up, using a chair, against a wall or sitting down. Ensure the area you are exercising in and the type of balance exercise is safe. Choose specific balance exercises that avoid any risk of falling or injury. Progress to balance exercises with movement when you have gained confidence.

### What will it do for me?

*Practicing balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to impending balance loss, thereby reducing the risk of falls, fractures and injuries. These are common in older adults and arthritis patients and can lead to significant health problems such as loss of independent mobility.*



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## Flexibility exercises—stretch!

<b>How much:</b>	Aim for at least once a day.
<b>How hard:</b>	Increase the range of exercises as you feel more comfortable. Avoid over-stretching. Acutely inflamed joints should be moved gently without causing increased pain in order to increase their range of movement.
<b>How long:</b>	Choose 8–10 stretch exercises and repeat 2-3 times. Hold each stretch for 10–30 seconds.
<b>What type:</b>	Every joint in your body should be taken through its complete range of motion. Try neck turns, shoulder circles, forward arm lifts, finger tuck, knee raises, elbow bends, hip swings and ankle circles.

### What will it do for me?

*Flexibility exercises decrease stiffness and increase or maintain a pain-free range of movement.*

## Sedentary living

**Reduce the amount of time being sedentary.** Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

**Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity).** It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

## Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer. Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none!**

## Exercise safety

Exercise in light shoes and insoles to reduce joint pain.

Avoid early morning or late night exercise if joint stiffness and pain is worse at that time.

Ensure all exercises are controlled and avoid ‘rapid’ movement that could cause joint problems.

During a flare up, when your joints are inflamed, rest more and protect painful, swollen, or inflamed joints. Don't stop moving altogether, instead, focus on range of motion exercises and gentle stretches.

Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10-15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level. Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell.

Ask for assistance with any exercises or equipment.

Consider an exercise partner. Making a commitment with a friend or co-worker will give you the extra push you need on days when your motivation is low.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you..

## Resources

Learn about free programs for Living Well with Arthritis by contacting the Arthritis Society (1-800-321-1433).

The Arthritis Society of Canada provides resources, videos and tips for healthy living: <https://arthritis.ca/living-well>

Scan for more physical activity resources!

