



Exercising with Pain

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 is of great significance for both the treatment and rehabilitation of pain. Regular exercise helps to alleviate the feelings of pain. It reduces your sensitivity to pain, depression, anxiety and stress—all of which contribute to your overall feelings of pain. Tai Chi is a great example of physical activity that has been shown to reduce pain and improve quality of life for individuals with fibromyalgia or chronic arthritis.

Regular exercise has been shown to improve the symptoms of chronic pain, lower back pain, fibromyalgia, neck pain, urogenital pain, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis. Inactivity can be associated with chronic and acute pain.

In addition, a regular exercise plan significantly reduces your risks of heart disease, some cancers, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, obesity, stroke, osteoporosis and depression, all of which have been linked to sedentary behaviour. Develop an exercise plan (and modify it when necessary) that helps you maximize the benefits of regular exercise to manage your pain effectively.

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

How much:	Aim for at least 150 – 300 minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least 75–150 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..
How hard:	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary. Increase intensity when you are comfortable exercising at this level.
How long:	Aim to spread out your 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. Take frequent breaks, if necessary, and ensure your exercise plan is enjoyable and not over-strenuous.

What type:	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities: walking, cycling, jogging, dancing, swimming, water aerobics, hiking—choose something you enjoy! Recreational team sports such as soccer, tennis, or volleyball are great social activities too! Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health.
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What will it do for me?

Regular and consistent exercise improves pain control, mobility and your overall health.

Build strength

How much:	At least twice a week.
How hard:	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time.
How long:	Choose 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Try 1–3 sets of each exercise.
What type:	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. Strength exercise can be performed standing or seated. Try squats, calf raises, wall push-ups, arm curls, knee curls, front and side arm raises, and chair stands using weights or a household item such as a can. Household chores such as carrying shopping, mowing the lawn or gardening are also good strength-building exercises.

What will it do for me?

Strength training can help improve your pain threshold and reduce the pain intensity depending on your disease condition. They also help to improve your ability to do the activities of daily living and your bone, muscle and joint health.

Improve balance

How much:	At least three days a week.
How hard:	Try 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10–15 times.
How long:	Hold each balance for 10–30 seconds.
What type:	Try yoga, Tai Chi or simple balance exercises for the home environment. Exercise safely when doing balance exercises. Balance exercise can be done standing up, using a chair, against a wall or sitting down.

What will it do for me?

Practising balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to a loss of balance and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries.



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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 to improve your motivation levels and engage in social activities. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer! Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none.**

Exercise safety

If you are taking pain medication, exercise safely and within your abilities as discussed with your healthcare provider.

Ask your doctor for more information about how to exercise safely and how to maintain an exercise plan, especially if you have had hip or back surgery. Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level.

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

Pain Canada provides online resources and programming across the country for individuals living with chronic pain. <https://www.paincanada.ca/resources/resources-for-people-with-pain>.



Scan for more
physical activity
resources!

