

ARTHRITIS and EXERCISE

Arthritis is a general term for approximately 100 diseases that produce either *inflammation* of connective tissue, particularly in joints, or noninflammatory degeneration of these tissues.

The word means "**Joint Inflammation**" but because other structures are also affected, the diseases are often called connective tissue diseases. The terms rheumatism and rheumatic diseases are also used. Causes of these disorders include immune-system reactions and the wear and tear of aging, while research indicates that the nervous system may often be equally involved. About one of seven Americans exhibit some form of arthritis.

Since no one has yet come up with a cure, arthritis treatment means figuring out the best way to live with it. And, whether you have osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis, appropriate exercise has become a very important means of treatment. Recent studies found that regular physical activity resulted in physiological as well as psychological benefits. Exercisers with rheumatoid arthritis increased their aerobic capacity, muscle strength and general functioning capacity. Decrease in pain level was reported as well. Similar results had been documented among people with osteoarthritis.

The proper choice of physical activity depends on the severity of the arthritis, and on the joints affected. It is important to work closely with a fitness specialist, physical therapist and a physician, to design an effective and safe program.

In general, for cardiovascular conditioning, people with arthritis and other joint problems should prefer low-impact and body-weight supporting activities, such as walking, swimming, cycling, rowing and water exercise, certain stationary equipment is also recommended. To strengthen muscles and joints - calisthenics and progressive resistance exercises are very useful.

Proper **duration** and **intensity** are key factors. In order to avoid aggravation of joint pain, start slowly with small amounts of low intensity activity. Rather underwork than

overwork yourself. Always warm up and cool down gradually, including gentle stretches and range of motion exercises.

Regularity is a key to success. In order to benefit from your efforts, it is important to stimulate your system at least every 48 hours,(every other day).Sporadic exercisers are very likely to get injured. Emphasize proper **form**, quality versus quantity.

In addition heat application, such as hot shower, bath or whirlpool before and after training, feel great and improve joint mobility.

All in all, avoid a sedentary lifestyle. Lack of motion results in decrease in joint mobility and exacerbation of the symptoms in the long run. Atrophy of muscle and joint, increases joint instability and decreases the ability to function normally. Appropriate movement helps to lubricate the joints, increases flexibility, strengthens muscles, tendons, ligaments and other tissues which are part of the joint structure.

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