

Physical Activity and Arthritis

This factsheet is for you if you have arthritis or arthritic type pain and your doctor or nurse has advised you to get more active.

Use the information in this factsheet with the booklet *Get Active Your Way*. Order your free copy on www.healthpromotion.ie



What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a term given to a group of more than 100 conditions that involve pain, stiffness and swelling in the joints of the body.

Some of the more common types of arthritis include:

- osteoarthritis (worsening joint disease)
- rheumatoid arthritis (inflammation in the joints)
- infectious arthritis (arthritis from an infection)
- juvenile arthritis (arthritis in those aged 16 or younger)

In Ireland, over 400,000 people are affected by osteoarthritis. This type of arthritis is generally caused by 'wear and tear'. The main joints affected are the knees, hips, hands and spine.

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How can physical activity help?

Regular physical activity can help make it easier for you to complete everyday activities by:

- reducing stiffness and pain
- increasing your flexibility
- strengthening the muscles around your joints
- improving your overall fitness, energy levels and sense of wellbeing

Regular physical activity will also:

- increase bone strength (reducing the risk of developing osteoporosis)
- help you reach and maintain a healthier weight
- improve your balance, posture and coordination

What type of physical activity is best?

The best type of physical activity you can do is a combination of exercises that address flexibility, muscle strength and general fitness.

To improve your flexibility, try **Yoga, Tai Chi** or **Pilates**. You should also practice bending your knees and elbows and turning your shoulders, wrists and hips. These are most effective when they are part of your daily routine.

To strengthen your muscles, try using **weights** and resistance bands, climbing stairs and carrying shopping. Try to include these in your activity plan two to three times a week.

To improve your overall fitness, try **aerobic** activity such as walking, cycling swimming, water walking and aqua aerobics.

A physiotherapist can give you tailored advice and support on becoming more active. Ask your GP for a referral or visit www.iscp.ie to find a registered physiotherapist.

How do I get started?



Use the booklet *Get Active Your Way* to help you make a plan to become more active regularly. Remember, it is important to balance activity and rest.

It is recommended to check with your GP before you start becoming more active. They can help you set realistic goals that take into account your level of fitness, symptoms and medication.

If you are not regularly active or are very overweight, start with bouts of ten minutes or less of exercise every day. You can gradually increase the amount of time you are active.

You will have some joint discomfort when you start. However, if you are in pain or feel discomfort for two hours or more after an activity, you may need to change your activity plan.

If you have pain and have difficulty moving joints such as your knees and hips, try water based activities.

To get the most health benefits from physical activity, you need to be physically active at a moderate intensity for at least 30 minutes a day on five days a week (or for 150 minutes a week).

How will I know if I am active at a moderate intensity?

You will know you are doing moderate intensity physical activity when you are:

- moving at a comfortable pace
- breathing faster but still able to carry on a conversation
- feeling warm
- sweating slightly

You can count all moderate intensity activities as long as those that last at least ten minutes.



Important

You need to avoid vigorous activity during a flare-up but do not stop activity. A flare-up is where your symptoms become worse. You can continue low impact activities such as walking. As the flare-up eases, gradually build your physical activity levels up again.

Useful contacts

www.arthritisireland.ie

www.iscp.ie

www.getirelandactive.ie

www.getirelandwalking.ie

