

Physical Activity

www.arthritis.org.nz

ARTHRITIS 
NEW ZEALAND

ENABLING A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

KAIPONAPONA AOTEAROA

Te whakapiki i te kounga ora

Did you know?

- Arthritis affects **one in six** New Zealanders over the age of 15 years
- There are more than **140 different forms** of arthritis
- Arthritis is the **single greatest cause of disability** in New Zealand

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A good physical activity programme is possible for people of all abilities, sizes, ages and attitudes.

Ease your arthritis – with physical activity

With arthritis, everyday tasks can be challenging, and the idea of becoming more physically active could be daunting. Experiencing ongoing pain, joint stiffness and fatigue can be extremely discouraging. However studies show that regular and appropriate physical activity help improve pain tolerance, mood and quality of life for people with arthritis.

A good physical activity programme is possible for people of all abilities, sizes, ages and attitudes.

Benefits of physical activity include:

- Reduced joint pain and stiffness
- Increased joint flexibility and movement
- Development of muscle strength
- Relief of muscular tension
- Keeping bones and cartilage healthy and strong
- Helping to control joint swelling
- Building up heart and lung function
- Assistance in developing good sleep patterns
- Reduced fatigue, anxiety and depression
- Weight loss and in turn decreased stress on weight bearing joints eg: hips and knees.

Remember: Always check with your doctor or specialist before starting new physical activity, especially if you have not been active for some time or if you have any other medical problems.

The best kind of physical activity for you depends on your arthritis and which joints and muscles are affected. To achieve the best result, ask your health professional to design an exercise programme tailored to your needs.

Use it, or lose it!

Physical activity is essential to maintaining resilient, strong muscles and joints. Inactivity decreases joint stability and mobility and can make your arthritic symptoms worse in the long run.

Being physically active should be part of your self-management plan along with taking your medication, having a balance between rest and recreation, eating a healthy diet and using joint protection techniques.

Start with low impact activities:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Aqua Jogging
- Hydrotherapy
- Cycling
- Tai Chi.

Try and make physical activity a regular part of your life; at least three times a week is a good start.



How should you exercise?

Start slowly, especially if you haven't been active for a while. You may need to pause for a small rest during periods of activity. If you have had a joint replacement, check with your surgeon and physiotherapist about what movements to avoid. There are three types of physical activity; it is best to include all of these in your plan.

- **Cardiovascular or Aerobic:** This gets your heart pumping and your lungs working – a little bit of huff and puff goes a long way, e.g. walking, cycling, swimming, dancing.
- **Strengthening:** This helps build well-toned muscles which will better support joints and absorb the physical stresses and strains of everyday life.
- **Flexibility:** Stretching exercises increase your range of movement and mobility. Always remember to warm up your muscles before you stretch. Move carefully and slowly, holding the stretch for about 30 seconds and, most importantly, stop if you feel pain. Only go as far as your comfort level allows.

When not to exercise

Be mindful of pushing the limits and being overly active when experiencing a flare of your arthritis, as exercising could aggravate the symptoms and cause further damage. Rest or minimise vigorous activity at these times and gently start again when the flare dies down.

Stop exercise if you experience shortness of breath and chest pain, and get medical help.

Helpful tips

Getting started often seems the most difficult part, and maintaining it even harder! Some helpful tips are:

- **Make a contract with yourself:** 6–12 weeks is a reasonable time commitment for a new physical activity programme to become established.
- **Make a physical activity diary or calendar:** put this where you can see it and fill it out every day.
- **Encourage a 'buddy' (family or friend) to join you:** for company and help each other keep on track.
- **Start your programme gradually:** begin your new physical activity for 10–15 minutes and work up from there. For good health and wellbeing aim for at least 30 minutes aerobic activity on most days of the week. Give your plan a chance to succeed. Sticking with it makes you a winner.
- **Review your programme after six weeks:** it's your programme and it should be enjoyable. If it's not fun, try something else!
- **Reward yourself for a job well done:** when you reach your first goal – then set your next goal with confidence.





Green prescriptions

A Green Prescription (GRx) is a health professional's written advice to a patient to be physically active, as part of a patient's health management plan.

Green Prescriptions are available nationwide.

The programme is designed to help and encourage people to be healthy and active and provides phone, face to face and group support.

Ask your doctor, practice nurse or Arthritis Educator about Green Prescriptions or you can call 0800 ACTIVE (0800 228 483) for more information.

Where can I learn more?

www.arthritis.org.nz

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Northern (Auckland) 09 523 8900

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