

Getting fit

As Arthritis Care launches its Fit to Move campaign, **Minal Smith** explains how to start and stay exercising



© James Steidl - Fotolia.com

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE AND GETTING STARTED

Exercise is good for people with arthritis, contrary to popular belief. It can give you:

- a better range of movement and joint mobility
- better pain management
- increased muscle strength
- stronger bones
- better weight control
- improved balance and co-ordination
- reduced stress and increased energy levels.

A good way to start getting active is to incorporate physical activity into your daily routine. Here are four steps to getting fit – remember to build up slowly.

1. Start with gentle stretches at home – from the armchair to standing up.
2. Incorporate exercise into your daily routine – start your joints moving by doing the housework, gardening, washing up or whatever tasks need doing around your home.
3. Walking is the easiest way to exercise – build up and walk a bit further each time.
4. Swimming and cycling are other low impact activities you can try. Find out what you like and stick to it.

EXCUSES NOT TO EXERCISE

People use a multitude of excuses to avoid exercising.

'It will make my arthritis worse'

Pain, and fear of harming joints can put people off exercising. Exercise does not make arthritis worse as long as the right technique is used and appropriate exercises are done. In fact, muscles lose strength and joints become painful if they are not exercised.

'I don't have time'

If you are busy, combine other activities with exercise – catch up with a friend during a walk instead of a coffee or take your nephew for a swim. Build physical activity into your daily routine – walk to work instead of taking the bus or climb the stairs instead of using the lift.

'I will look stupid'

Self-consciousness about exercising in front of others due to anxiety about your level of fitness or body image is a common concern. People are probably too busy worrying about themselves to look at you. Get used to exercising in front of others by starting with a friend.



© Pete Saloutos - Fotolia.com

HOW TO STAY MOTIVATED

- Set realistic goals.
- Don't be deterred if the benefits are not immediate.
- Reward yourself for reaching your goals – give yourself a little treat.
- Vary your routine and activities.
- Little and often is the best approach and may make exercise feel less daunting.
- Make it fun – arrange to go dancing with friends or exercise in the park.
- Join a gym or exercise class if you feel advice from an instructor would help.

HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR JOINTS WHEN EXERCISING

- Wear supportive, cushioned footwear.
- A warm bath or shower before exercise may help relax muscles.
- It is best to exercise when you have least pain and stiffness.
- Do not continue with an exercise that causes severe pain or discomfort. If you feel more pain two hours after exercising than you did before you started, do less next time.
- Take care with a hot, inflamed joint. It is often too painful to move through its full range of movement but you should move it within the limits of pain.
- Check with your doctor or physiotherapist whether there are any movements you should avoid if you have had joint surgery.
- Ask to see a physiotherapist if you are unsure about a technique or which exercises are best for your condition.



© .shook - Fotolia.com