Exercise and Arthritis
About this booklet 3
Exercising for health 4
   Why exercise is important 5
   Making that commitment 6
   Beginning a new exercise routine 7
   The importance of good posture 8
   Exercising with a joint replacement 10
   Exercising during a flare-up 12
   Tips for staying motivated 13
The different types of exercise 14
   Range of movement 16
   Strengthening 24
   Aerobic 30
Other forms of exercise 39
   Yoga 39
   Pilates 40
   Tai Chi 41
Tips for specific types of arthritis 42
   Osteoarthritis 42
   Rheumatoid arthritis 43
   Osteoporosis 43
   Fibromyalgia 44
   Ankylosing spondylitis 44
   Lupus 45
Some general tips 46
Arthritis Care: here for you 48
Other useful organisations 50
Can you help us? 54
EXERCISE CAN SEEM DAUNTING if you are living with the pain of arthritis every day. However, establishing a good exercise routine helps limit pain, maintains mobility, boosts energy and keeps muscles strong to support joints. It can also help prevent disability.

This booklet explains the benefits of exercise and details some easy exercises that you can try anywhere. You will be on the road to fitness and wellbeing in no time!

What do you think of this booklet? Email us on reviewing@arthritiscare.org.uk with your thoughts – we would really like to hear from you.
Modern living, with its armchair entertainment, sedentary office jobs and cars, does not encourage exercise. Finding the right sort of exercise will really help you to manage your arthritis. The more you do, the better you will feel, and could help your arthritis.

The NHS recommends that all adults, of all ages, should undertake a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise at least five days a week. If you feel that this is too much for you to do in one go initially, you may choose to break it down into blocks of just 5 to 10 minutes. The important thing is to set yourself realistic goals, to choose an exercise routine that suits you and your lifestyle, and to keep it up. This is what will guarantee success.
Why exercise is important

Exercise benefits most people, but, if you have arthritis, you will find that the benefits of regular exercise are particularly significant. It can assist in pain control and help you lead an independent life.

Exercise is key in helping to achieve and maintain a healthy weight, which is one of the most effective things you can do to reduce some of the symptoms of arthritis. Even losing just a bit of excess weight can reduce strain on your back or the joints in your legs, and making sure you are not underweight will help give your body the strength needed to get through a flare-up and to fight disease.

The many benefits of exercise include:

- better range of movement and joint mobility
- better pain management
- increased muscle strength
- stronger bones – which can help protect against osteoporosis
- weight control
- improved balance and co-ordination
- reduced stress
- improved sleep patterns
- increased energy levels
- better breathing
- improved self-esteem
Making that commitment

Many people with arthritis feel they have good reasons for avoiding exercise, whether it’s pain, stiffness, or a fear of harming joints. But the reality is that lack of exercise can make these things worse; if muscles are not used they can lose strength, and joints can become painful, stiff and unstable.

It is important to find the right type of exercise, and to do it at a time that suits you – perhaps first thing in the morning or spread throughout the day. Building an exercise routine into your daily life may take a bit of getting used to at first, but after a while, it can become second nature.

Making the decision to begin exercising on a regular basis is vital, but so is understanding your arthritis and how it might affect you while exercising.
Beginning a new exercise routine

During the first couple of weeks of a new routine, expect to feel a small increase in discomfort because your muscles are probably being worked in a way that is unfamiliar. It is usual to experience stiffness when doing new exercises and not necessarily a negative thing. Even with regular and familiar exercise, it is normal to feel the effects of the exercise afterwards, especially in your muscles.

There are, however, a few things to watch out for that may be signs you are overdoing it. These can include experiencing pain two hours after exercising, or if you experience persistent fatigue, any decrease in your range of movement, or increased joint swelling.

Don’t be put off! You may find that a small adjustment to your routine is all that’s needed, for example, simply doing fewer repetitions of a particular exercise, or building up the routine more gradually.

However, if at any time an exercise gives you a sharp pain, especially in the joint itself, stop doing it immediately and, before trying that particular exercise again, seek advice from a doctor or physiotherapist.
The importance of good posture

If you have arthritis, you will find that developing and maintaining good posture can really help to put less strain on your body.

People with poor posture tend to slouch, causing the weight of the body to fall forward, which puts strain on muscles and joints. Poor posture can develop for a number of reasons, but it can be due to muscles and tendons being either too tight or too weak and not supporting the body as they should.

Good posture aligns the body. It can be hard work to maintain good posture, but improvements can be achieved in a short space of time. Exercise is key, and different exercises can help in different ways, including to strengthen, lengthen and even shorten muscles.

Some tips for achieving good posture when standing:

- stand with your feet slightly apart and try to imagine that you are suspended from a hook on the top of your head
- gently lengthen and straighten your neck and back, allow your shoulders to relax and drop, and allow your chin to relax
- your arms should be relaxed and loose
- your ears should be directly in line over your shoulders
- very gently tilt your pelvis back slightly, so that it is level; this will encourage your stomach to flatten and your bottom to tuck under
- your hips should be in line with your knees and feet.
If you can, check your posture by looking in a mirror, or by asking a friend. When your posture is good, your body will feel more relaxed.

Think about your posture throughout the day. Check yourself while walking, at work, while driving, or while sitting watching television. If you can increase your body awareness during daily activities, your good posture will quickly become a habit.
Exercising with a joint replacement

For some people with arthritis, joints such as hips, knees or shoulders may become so damaged and painful that replacement surgery is needed.

If you are awaiting surgery, it is important to note that its success can depend in part on how well you look after your joint. You will need to exercise it in order to keep the muscles around it strong, while at the same time being careful not to overstrain it. If you are waiting for an operation, make sure you:

- Exercise beforehand, as this will help to strengthen the muscles around the joint that is being replaced and speed up recovery after the operation.
- It is often more comfortable to do exercises that are not weight-bearing, such as swimming and cycling.
- As range of movement can be hard to regain after an operation, be sure to include range of movement exercises.
- Even just 10 to 15 minutes a day can make a big difference.
After an operation:

- Ensure you use the correct technique when exercising; check with your surgeon or physiotherapist before beginning any routine.
- Low-impact exercises such as walking and swimming are ideal, but don’t overdo it, and avoid any stroke that may overstretch your new joint (such as breaststroke).
- High-impact exercises, such as running, should be avoided after hip or knee surgery, to avoid injury to the new joint and to help it last longer.
- Having a fall can damage a replacement joint, so any activity with a high risk of falling – such as skiing – should also be avoided.
- Be careful to avoid any activity that might risk dislocation of a replacement joint. For example, with a new hip replacement, avoid excessive bending, lifting your knee higher than hip height, or doing any exercise involving crossing a leg across the mid-line of the body. This may rule out breaststroke in swimming.
- Get advice before you play any contact sports; these are not usually advised after joint surgery.
Some people with certain forms of arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus, experience what is known as a flare-up. This is when inflammation is suddenly more active, and pain, swelling, and stiffness get worse. Flare-ups can last from a couple of days to a few weeks.

It is important to keep doing gentle exercises during a flare-up of arthritis, especially range of movement exercises (see pages 16–23). However, it is advisable to cut down on the rest of the routine, and to cut out more strenuous exercise entirely. Instead, try gentle muscle-strengthening exercises.

As the flare-up subsides, you can slowly build up the routine again. But don’t be tempted to start at the same level as before, as your physical fitness may have reduced a little, especially if the flare lasted for some time.

If only one joint is affected by a flare-up, try adapting your exercises to give the rest of your body a good workout while not aggravating the inflamed joint.

Keep in mind the two-hour rule: if your joints still hurt two hours after exercise, you have probably done too much.

Exercising during a flare-up

If you have taken painkillers, take care not to exercise too hard.
Finding a form of exercise that you find enjoyable, and which suits your lifestyle and financial situation, is crucial for motivation. These tips can help you stay motivated:

- Vary your routine and the activities you do, as this will reduce the chance of you getting bored. Variety also boosts fitness, as your body has less chance to get used to what it is doing. Add variety to the activities themselves, or try varying the speed or intensity of your routine. Perhaps get a friend to join you when exercising.

- Don’t set your goals too high – make them realistic and short-term, especially at the outset, and build up your routine gradually so that it becomes part of everyday life.

- Write down your goals and keep a note of your achievements so you can see the progress you are making.

- Exercise at a time that suits you. At home, it is a good idea to exercise at the same time every day so that the routine becomes familiar. If attending a class, find one at a time that fits in with your lifestyle. If you do, you will be far more likely to go, and to keep going.

- Allow yourself unscheduled rest days if needed. You will probably need to miss sessions occasionally and this shouldn’t worry you, but return to your schedule as soon as you can. Physical fitness, energy levels and muscle strength can all start to decline after missing just three or four sessions. And building up muscle strength is a lot harder than maintaining it.

It won’t be long before improvements begin to show. When they do, don’t stop! To maintain the benefits, exercising needs to be a life-long commitment.
The different types of exercise

People with arthritis benefit from range of movement, strengthening and aerobic exercise. The differences between the three types are explained below, and pages 16–37 give more detailed information on particular types of exercise to try.

An appropriate programme will depend on the type and severity of your arthritis and your general level of fitness. A good exercise programme will include all three types of exercise.

Range of movement exercises (ROM) – also known as stretching exercises, these can help ease joint pain and improve joint movement, helping you maintain maximum flexibility in your joints. It is important to work at maintaining as much range of movement as possible in any damaged joints to prevent any worsening of the joint condition or pain. This kind of exercise involves taking joints through their comfortable range of movement and then easing them just a little further. This should be done smoothly and gently, so it can be done even when in pain and during a flare-up.
Strengthening exercises are often recommended to help stiffness and pain, particularly in hips and knees. They work on strengthening muscles, which in turn help move, protect and support the joints more effectively. With stronger muscles, joints become more stable, and tasks such as walking and climbing stairs become easier.

Aerobic exercise raises your heart rate and makes you breathe faster. Examples include walking, cycling and swimming. Other activities, such as doing the housework or some gardening, can also count as aerobic exercise. It is a good idea to aim to complete around 30 minutes of this kind of exercise five times a week, but it is important to build up to this slowly if at first it feels too much. Hydrotherapy or warm water exercises can be particularly good for your joints.
Range of movement exercises

These exercises can be done in any order, but generally it is a good idea to start with the extremities and work inwards.

Try to do all of these exercises but, if pushed for time, concentrate on the areas affected by your arthritis. Take your time and think about each activity as you do it. Think about the particular area of your body you are working. It is better to focus on certain exercises and follow them carefully and slowly, rather than to rush through all of them.

Try these range of movement exercises twice a day, every day, concentrating each time on taking your joints through their full range of movement. Each exercise should be repeated. Begin with 3 or 4 repetitions in each exercise session, gradually increasing to 10 repetitions over time.
For the hands, wrists and forearms

- Curl your fingers into a fist and stretch them back out.

- Spread your fingers into a wide span and then close them together.

- Circle your thumbs back and forth.

- Stretch your thumb away from the palm of your hand as far as you can. Pull the thumb back to touch each fingertip of the same hand in turn. [figure 1]

- With your arms resting on the arms of a chair, rotate your forearms so that your palms face the ceiling and then turn them to face the floor. Keep your elbow in a fixed position. [figures 2 and 3]

- Resting your wrists on the arms of a chair, bend your wrists up and down towards and away from your body (This is one of the most important exercises).

**Tips**

- If your fingers are a bit stiff, try the exercise with your hands in a bowl of warm water or after washing up.

- These exercises can also help relieve morning stiffness.

- You can do most of these exercises while at your desk at work or while watching television.
For the ankles and feet

- When lying down or sitting with your feet up, bend your feet up and down to point your toes.

- In the same position, move your feet in circles clockwise then anti-clockwise.

- Wriggle your toes up and down and try to spread them out.

- Sitting down and keeping the outside edge of your foot on the floor, raise the inner edge (so that you are showing the sole of your foot). Repeat with other foot. [figure 4]

- Keeping the inside edge of your foot on the floor, raise the outer edge (so that you are showing the sole of your foot). Repeat with other foot. Return to a flat position. Keep your knees in a fixed position throughout this exercise. [figure 5]
For the shoulders

• Slowly shrug your shoulders up and down.

• Roll your shoulders in both directions, forwards and backwards.

• Stretch your arms above your head.

• Putting both hands behind your head, bring your elbows together and pull apart again. Avoid pulling on your head.

• Putting your hands on your shoulders (left on left and right on right) so that your elbows are out at the side, circle the elbows up and back. [figure 6]

• Putting your arms out behind your back with the palms facing inwards, pull your shoulder blades together.

• Hold a stick, a hoover attachment or a rolling pin behind your back, one end in each hand. Keeping your elbows straight, lift the stick upwards away from your body.

Tips
• All of these exercises can be done while standing or sitting.
• Some of these exercises can be done in the car, while at a desk at work, or while watching television.
• If at any point these exercises cause dizziness, stop.
For the neck

• Tuck your chin in to make a double chin. You will feel the stretch in the back of your neck. Do not do this exercise if you have rheumatoid arthritis. [figure 7]

• Keeping your chin in the same position, turn your head to look over your right shoulder as far as is comfortable and then over your left.

• Keeping your chin in the same position and shoulders level, drop your right ear towards your right shoulder and then the left ear towards the left shoulder.

Tips
• All of these exercises can be done while standing or sitting.
• Some of these exercises can be done in the car, while at a desk at work, or while watching television.
• Always avoid circular movements of the neck.
For the back

- Lying flat on your back with your knees bent up and feet flat, roll your knees from side to side.

- Lying on your back with your knees bent up and your feet flat, push your back flat into the floor, tilting your hip bones towards your face then away from you towards your feet.

- Either when standing up or when sitting on a chair, and keeping your hips in a fixed position, slowly turn around to the left as far as you can, then turn around to the right.

- Either when standing up or when sitting on a chair, and keeping your hips in a fixed position, slowly lean down to the side towards the floor to the left and then down to the right.

Tip
- Exercises done lying down should be done on a flat surface to keep your body in alignment. If you find it difficult getting up and down from the floor, try doing them on a firm mattress.
For the hips

- Standing and holding onto something firm, such as a banister or a table, slowly swing your leg back and forth in front of you and behind you.

- Lying on your back, bend one knee up towards your chest and then lower it. Repeat with the other leg.

- Also on your back and keeping the knee straight, slide one leg out to the side and back in again. Repeat with the other leg.

- Lying on your back with your knees bent and feet together, allow your knees to fall apart out to the sides as far as possible. [figure 8]
For the knees

• Sitting on a chair, bend each leg back under the seat and then straighten your leg. This is a good exercise to do when travelling or in a theatre or cinema – it can help reduce the stiffness felt when standing up after a long period of sitting.

• Sitting over the edge of the bed, swing your knees back and forth to help loosen morning stiffness.

• Sitting on the floor with your legs out straight, bend your knee fully up to your hip then slowly lower out straight. Repeat with the other leg.

Tip
• Many of these range of movement exercises can be adapted to be done in water.
Strengthening exercises

For the hands and wrists

- With your hand flat on the table, hold a piece of paper tightly between your fingers. Try to remove it with your other hand.

- With your forearm resting palm down on your thigh or on a table, try lifting up your hand while resisting the movement by placing your opposite hand on top. Repeat with the other hand and with palm up. [figure 9]

- Repeat the exercise above, but rest your palm down instead of up.

- Also to improve grip, gently squeeze a soft ball and hold it for 5 or 10 seconds.
For the ankles

• Sitting on a chair with your feet on the floor, put one foot on top of the other foot. Try lifting the foot that is underneath while resisting movement with the foot that is on top. Repeat with your other foot.

• Sitting on a chair, hold a rubber exercise band or a pair of tights around your foot. Point your toes towards the floor using the band for resistance. Repeat with your other foot. Then stand, using a chair or banister for balance, and push up on your toes to go on tip-toe.

Note
• Repeat these strengthening exercises up to 10 times each.
• Build up the number of repetitions gradually.
• Tense and hold the muscles in each position for 5 to 10 seconds.
For the back

- Lying on your back with your knees bent and feet flat, tighten your stomach by pushing the small of your back downwards. Hold the position, then relax.

- Lying on your back with your knees bent and feet flat, bring your knee up to your hip and hug it to your chest. Hold for 10 seconds then let it go. Repeat with the other leg and then repeat with both legs together.

- Lying on your stomach with your arms in front of you, raise yourself up on to your elbows, keeping your hands flat on the floor. Slowly lower yourself down. [figure 10]
For the hips and knees

- Lying on your back on the floor or a firm bed, tighten your thigh muscles and push the back of your knees downwards. Hold for 10 seconds then relax.

- Lying on your back with your knees bent and feet flat, lift your bottom off the floor, squeezing your buttocks together.

- Lying on your side, with your bottom leg bent and top leg in line with your body, tighten the front thigh muscle then lift the top leg about 10 inches (or 250 mm) away from the floor. Hold then lower. Repeat on the other side. [figure 11]
For the hips and knees

- Lying on your stomach, tighten the front thigh muscle then lift your leg up straight to a comfortable height, keeping the knee straight. Hold then lower.

- Lying on your side, cross your top leg over your lower leg putting your foot on the floor. Lift your lower leg up. Hold then lower. Repeat with the other leg. (If you have had a hip replacement, check with your physiotherapist before doing this exercise.)
For the knees

• Lying on the floor or a firm bed with a pillow or rolled-up towel under your knees, straighten one knee, raising the heel. Hold the position and relax.

• Lying flat on your back with your legs straight, pull your toes towards you so they point up to the ceiling and tighten the muscles above the knees. Hold and relax. This can also be done standing up.

• Lying down or standing, place a pillow or rolled up towel between your thighs and squeeze it, tightening your buttocks.

• Lying on your back, push your knee flat into the floor or bed and raise your leg into the air to a comfortable height. Lower slowly. Make sure you keep your leg straight throughout this exercise. This may be more comfortable to do if the opposite knee is bent with the foot flat on the bed.

• Sitting down, fully straighten your knees, hold for 10 seconds and then slowly lower.
Aerobic exercises

Walking

Walking is an excellent form of exercise, and for many of us it is one of the easiest forms of exercise to incorporate into everyday life – for example, by taking the dog for a walk or walking to the shops.

If you haven’t done much walking, it is a good idea to start with walks of 5 to 10 minutes, and gradually increase the distance. Then aim to go on a few brisker walks each week to get full aerobic exercise.

Although most of us don’t really think about how we walk, it is a good idea to give some thought to how you place your foot and move through your stride. Try to land on the heel of the foot and roll forward to drive off from the ball of the foot, and to maintain good posture. Choose well-fitting, cushioned, non-slip shoes, such as trainers, to improve your comfort.
If you enjoy walking but feel unsteady on your feet, using a stick may make you feel more secure. If you have one painful hip, knee or foot, hold a stick in your hand on the opposite side. It is also important to have a stick that is the right height. Many sticks or walking poles are easily adjustable. An occupational therapist or physiotherapist will be able to help measure and select one that is right for you.

Walking poles like these are easily height adjustable. Look for those that include sprung shock absorbers. These cushion impact and make them very comfortable to use.
Water

Swimming

Swimming is a good all-round aerobic exercise as it not only stretches and strengthens muscles, but also gives the heart a good work out. It is particularly suited to people with arthritis as is it possible to move more freely in water. Water also supports the weight of the body, so there is minimal strain on joints, which can help reduce pain.

There are a number of different swimming styles, and some may feel more natural and comfortable for you than others. If you can, try backstroke or front crawl, as these put less strain on your joints. Breaststroke is best avoided if you have arthritis in your knee or hip joints, as it tends to put too much strain on them, and it can also strain the neck if the head is kept out of the water.

If you are unsure about your swimming technique, check with an instructor for any tips on how to improve your stroke.
Hydrotherapy

Hydrotherapy exercise is done under the supervision of a physiotherapist. A hydrotherapy pool is heated to a warm temperature, which helps to relax muscles and allows joints to move more easily. It is smaller than a swimming pool, with water usually up to shoulder level.

If exercising in a pool other than a hydrotherapy pool, it is a good idea to check the water temperature to make sure it is warm enough. A warmer temperature is needed for exercising than for swimming, as the body generates its own heat more readily when swimming. Children’s pools can be warmer and shallower, making them easier to get into and out of than the main swimming pool.

**Note**

Usually you will need a referral from your doctor for hydrotherapy sessions. Ask your GP or rheumatologist about facilities in your area. If there aren’t any, ask a physiotherapist to demonstrate some exercises that you might be able to adapt in a swimming pool.

► Local Arthritis Care groups and other disability groups, such as BackCare, run hydrotherapy sessions. A local library should have details.
Aqua aerobics

Many people with arthritis enjoy aqua-aerobics classes, which are commonly available at local swimming pools. They are usually taught at different levels; try starting with the easiest level, or look for classes specifically designed for people with mobility problems.

The advantage of doing an aerobics class in water is that, unlike on land, there is significantly less stress on joints. Make sure the water is deep enough – the deeper it is, the more it will support your body weight. If you find some of the exercises difficult, you can always ask the instructor to suggest alternative moves.

Tip
Whatever pool activity you choose, it is wise to check beforehand that you will be able to access the pool comfortably. Some pools only have ladder steps, which some people with arthritis find difficult to use.
Dance

Dancing can be great fun – whether ballroom, salsa, jazz or line dancing, there is a style for everyone. Not only is it a good and varied way of keeping active, it can also help improve posture, breathing and general fitness, and it is a very sociable activity.

Before beginning a class, tell the dance instructor that you have arthritis. Also, if you have had a hip or knee replacement, check with a doctor that the dance moves are suitable before beginning a class.

There are many different forms of dance, for a variety of different abilities. If you’re unsure what you might like to try, ask if you can observe a class before deciding to join.

As well as structured dance styles, you can of course dance freely – at home, in clubs or at parties, for example. Although this can be relaxing and enjoyable, and it can give a really good workout, be careful not to put excessive stress on joints.
Cycling

Cycling is a good aerobic exercise that can help improve balance and muscle strength. It can be enjoyed alone, with a friend, or in a group. Modern bikes can be adapted to suit individual needs, with adjustable handle bars, seats and positions, and gears and brakes that can be fine-tuned – just ask a local bike shop or bike specialist.

Exercise classes

Exercise classes are offered all over the UK, in gyms, studios and village halls. Providing interaction with other people and supervision from an instructor, classes can be an especially motivating way to exercise.

There is a huge range of options for all ages, abilities and interests. A good way to find a class is to ask at your local leisure centre, or your local library or council. Some local authorities have a sports development team who have a particular health remit and may organise specialist classes in the community.

For a list of trainers, contact the national register of personal trainers. Visit nrpt.co.uk or call 01536 425920.
Don’t forget to check with a doctor or physiotherapist before joining a class to see if any moves should be avoided, especially if you have had a joint replaced.

**Gyms and leisure centres**

Gyms and leisure centres offer a range of different exercise options and provide the latest equipment in motivating surroundings and under expert supervision. As well as a gym or swimming pool, many leisure centres include access to a sauna, steam room or jacuzzi, which all offer heat benefits to those with arthritis.

Many exercises are not suitable for people with arthritis so it is important to explain to an instructor what you are comfortable doing. They should draw up a fitness plan for you, and it is a good idea to run this past a doctor or physiotherapist before beginning.

Gyms can sometimes feel intimidating at first. If you are unsure whether it is for you, you can always ask for a free tour to check it out before you join. And when you do sign up, you will be asked to complete an induction session, where you will be taught how to use the equipment. Usually you won’t be allowed to begin using the facilities until you have completed an induction session.
Tips for joining a gym or class

There are a number of things to consider before joining a gym or signing up to any exercise class:

• ask as many questions as possible before you join

• check that the venue and its facilities are accessible

• check that fitness instructors have up-to-date qualifications (many gyms have their own internal training programmes that allows instructors to regularly update their knowledge and skills)

• inform the staff you have arthritis, or contact a particular class instructor to tell them about your condition

• try to determine whether the instructor has a good understanding of your condition and make sure you have confidence in their ability to take your needs into account

• ask for a free gym trial or consultation before signing up for membership

• after deciding to join a gym, expect to be given a fitness test and asked medical questions

• don’t expect to use the gym alone until an instructor has demonstrated how to use the equipment at an induction session

• any exercise programme should be reviewed regularly – every two to three months.
Yoga

Yoga is a popular holistic exercise that combines exercise, breathing and relaxation to promote flexibility and strength in mind, body and spirit. It calms the mind and emotions, helps improve muscle tone and mobility, and aids relaxation by undoing tension. Muscles and joints, circulation, digestion and the nervous and endocrine systems are all stimulated and balanced by careful breathing techniques, while the body is moved into different positions.

Ensure you find a teacher who understands arthritis and can adapt movements for individual needs, particularly if you have replacement joints. Yoga can be demanding, especially at first. Check with a doctor or physiotherapist to find out if there are any particular movements to avoid.

There are yoga classes specifically for people with arthritis, people with limited mobility, or for older people. Some teachers also work on a one-to-one basis. Speak to the teacher before you begin a class and ask for a trial period to make sure it is right for you.
Pilates

A fusion of western and eastern philosophies, Pilates teaches body awareness, breathing, balance, co-ordination, strength and flexibility. Like yoga, it is a holistic exercise – treating the mind as well as the body. Its emphasis is on stretching and strengthening the whole body, without building bulk.

With a series of gentle, controlled movements targeting the deep postural muscles, Pilates builds strength from the inside out, putting little strain on joints. It can be done by people of any fitness level. Exercises are done mostly on a mat and don’t usually involve much getting up or down.

Discuss your condition with a qualified teacher to establish the kind of exercises that suit your needs, and check the moves with a doctor before starting on a programme.

Pilates can be taught on a one-to-one basis or as part of a class. One-to-one classes tend to be a lot more expensive but, if your arthritis is more severe, it might be a good idea to begin with a few one-to-one sessions. Then, when you are confident in what you are doing, try moving on to a class, taking your adapted moves with you.
Tai Chi

Originally a Chinese martial art, Tai Chi is more usually practised in the west now as a meditative exercise. It is suitable for almost anyone, aiming to improve the flow of chi (energy), calm the mind, and promote self-healing.

Tai Chi exercises the body, helps to strengthen muscles, and may help to free up joints. It consists of slow, fluid, gentle and circular movements. It can be practised almost anywhere, and the intensity can be adjusted to suit your needs.

Many people with arthritis favour Tai Chi, as it improves energy, fitness and balance. It also helps to correct body posture and improves circulation, flexibility and breathing.

It is best to learn Tai Chi in a class where an instructor can demonstrate the correct moves, but it can also be learned from videos. Many of the exercises are performed standing up, but can be adapted to do sitting down, and many classes can be adapted to suit people with arthritis.

Tai Chi is suitable for people of all ages and levels of fitness, but if you join a class, let the instructor know you have arthritis.
Tips for specific types of arthritis

People living with certain types of arthritis may find that their symptoms dictate how and when they exercise, and we look at a few of these here. If you have a condition not mentioned here and would like information about appropriate exercise, talk to your doctor or physiotherapist, or call Arthritis Care’s helpline to be signposted to the relevant organisation.

**Osteoarthritis**

- Regular exercise is one of the best ways of relieving the symptoms of osteoarthritis. Keeping active strengthens the muscles around the joints, helping to prevent further degeneration. Exercise also helps to maintain a healthy weight, which will reduce the strain on certain joints.
- Develop a moderate exercise programme – a strenuous programme may cause more pain and possibly accelerate deterioration.
- Range of movement exercises should be done every day in every joint.
- The routine should not increase your levels of pain beyond the two-hour rule (see page 12).
- Never force a painful joint.
Rheumatoid arthritis

- A successful exercise routine requires a balance of rest and activity for people with rheumatoid arthritis.
- Exercise when least tired.
- Range of movement exercises should be done at least once a day – perhaps early to help ease morning stiffness, or before going to bed to help reduce stiffness at night.
- Strengthening exercises are important to build muscle to protect and support joints.
- Low-impact aerobic exercises such as swimming or cycling are good for people with rheumatoid arthritis.
- Always maintain good posture (see pages 8–9).

Osteoporosis

- Maintaining a regular exercise routine throughout life can help prevent osteoporosis, as exercise strengthens bones.
- Weight-bearing, range of movement, strengthening and aerobic exercises are important for the prevention of osteoporosis.
- Always maintain good posture (see pages 8–9).

The National Osteoporosis Society produces an exercise booklet especially for people with osteoporosis (see page 53).
Fibromyalgia

- Research shows that exercise can be beneficial to people with fibromyalgia, increasing fitness levels, improving sleep and helping them cope with pain better.
- Gentle or moderate aerobic or strengthening exercises are best – vigorous exercise can worsen symptoms.
- Incorporate range of movement and gentle strengthening exercises into your daily routine.
- Maintain good posture.

Ankylosing spondylitis

- Appropriate exercise is vital for managing ankylosing spondylitis.
- Stretching exercises of the neck, spine, shoulders and hips are particularly important.
- Strengthening exercises for the back and hips are good for helping to maintain good posture.
- Swimming is an excellent exercise for people with ankylosing spondylitis. If you have neck restrictions, try using a mask and a snorkel to breathe while swimming.
- Avoid jerky movements and high-impact exercises.
Lupus

- Finding the right time to exercise is important for people with lupus because of the tiredness associated with the condition.
- Develop a programme of moderate exercise that includes range of movement, strengthening and aerobic exercise.
- Walking, swimming and cycling are good moderate aerobic activities for people with lupus.
- Doing stretching exercises before going to bed may help reduce morning stiffness in joints.
- Avoid high-impact exercises if you have arthritis as part of your lupus.
Some general tips

Following the information in this booklet means you can exercise in a way that will improve your symptoms of arthritis and help protect your joints from damage. Doing safe and appropriate exercise means you could achieve a new level of fitness. Keep the following in mind:

• It is best to exercise when you have the least pain, stiffness or tiredness, and your medication is having maximum effect.
• Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothes and supportive, cushioned footwear.
• A warm bath or shower before prolonged exercise may help relax muscles.
• For stretching and strengthening exercises, little and often is best – try blocks of 5 to 10 minutes instead of all in one go.
• Never force a joint.
• Do not continue with an exercise that causes severe pain or discomfort.
• Respect the two-hour rule – if you feel more pain two hours after exercising (other than normal muscle ache) than you did before you started, do less next time.
• Avoid exercising 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. Return gradually to exercise once the inflammation has subsided.
• If you have had joint surgery, check with your doctor whether there are any movements you should avoid. Also check with your doctor if you have a condition affecting your heart or lungs.
• It is best to do lying down exercises on a hard surface like the floor – your posture will be out of alignment on a soft surface.

• An exercise mat may make exercising on the floor more comfortable.

• If possible, try to maintain good posture.

• Incorporate simple exercise into your daily routine, for example when vacuuming, washing floors, doing the dishes, or gardening.

• Think of your leisure pursuits as exercise opportunities, for example gentle gardening can involve some stretching and use of different sets of muscles (but be careful not to overdo it).

• Take up hobbies that are naturally good for your joints, for example playing the piano or knitting can both give your fingers a good stretch.

• Any small opportunity to exercise is a useful one. Use the stairs rather than taking a lift or escalator, or get up to change television channels rather than using the remote.

• Don’t let yourself be disheartened if the benefits of a new exercise routine are not immediate; it can take a while but it will be beneficial in time.

• Make exercise a habit: keep positive and keep it up.
Here for you

If you have arthritis we understand how it can affect you, your life and those around you. Whether you’ve been recently diagnosed and want to find out more or you’ve been living with arthritis for a while, we’re here for you.

We believe there is always something you can do to reduce the impact of arthritis and look to the future with confidence.

There’s a free helpline, a range of services and free information leaflets and booklets that you can find on our website or order by post.

Talk to us

Talking about arthritis, sharing your concerns and how you feel can really help. Our free helpline is run by people with experience of arthritis who are there to listen and help you find answers to your questions. Our free, confidential phone line is open weekdays on 0808 800 4050.

We can:

- Help you with any questions you have about arthritis
- Help you understand the financial benefits that may be available to you
- Be there to listen if you need someone to talk to
- Provide you with information about staying in work
- Tell you about services and courses that can help you in your area
- Send you a range of free information leaflets and booklets.
Talk to others

There are Living with Arthritis services all over the country, often run by people who have arthritis with the time to listen to what’s happening in your life, help you to understand your condition and manage your symptoms better and talk through your options.

There are Arthritis Care groups and branches, run by people with arthritis, giving you the opportunity to spend time with others who share and understand what it’s like to live with arthritis.

Or you may prefer to visit our online community where you can chat to others with arthritis about the things that matter to you.

To find out more go to arthritiscare.org.uk, call the free helpline weekdays on 0808 800 4050 or contact one of our offices:

- England: 020 7380 6540
- Northern Ireland: 028 9078 2940
- Scotland: 0141 954 7776
- Wales: 029 2044 4155

Become a member of Arthritis Care and receive *Inspire*, our quarterly magazine on how to live well with arthritis.
Other useful organisations

**General**

**Arthritis Research UK**  
Funds medical research into arthritis and produces information.  
Tel: 0300 790 0400  
[arthritisresearchuk.org](http://arthritisresearchuk.org)

**Sport England**  
Tel: 0345 850 8508  
[sportengland.org](http://sportengland.org)

**English Federation of Disability Sport**  
Tel: 01509 227750 or 0161 228 2868  
[efds.co.uk](http://efds.co.uk)

**Sport Wales**  
Tel: 0300 300 3111  
[sportwales.org.uk](http://sportwales.org.uk)

**Disability Sport Wales**  
Tel: 0300 300 3115  
[disabilitysportwales.com](http://disabilitysportwales.com)

**Sport Northern Ireland**  
Tel: 028 9038 1222  
[sportni.net](http://sportni.net)

**Disability Sports Northern Ireland**  
Tel: 028 9046 9925  
[disni.co.uk](http://disni.co.uk)

**Sport Scotland**  
Tel: 0141 634 6500  
[sportscotland.org.uk](http://sportscotland.org.uk)

**Scottish Disability Sport**  
Tel: 0131 317 1130  
[scottishdisabilitysport.com](http://scottishdisabilitysport.com)
Classes and trainers

Contact your local council, sports centre or libraries, or check online for details of exercise and sports clubs and courses available in your area.

Excel 2000
Offers disabled people structured movement to music; workshops as well as video and audio tapes.
Tel: 01263 825670

Extend
Movement to music for the over 60s and disabled people of any age.
Tel: 01582 832760
[extend.org.uk](http://extend.org.uk)

The Fitness League
Offers low-impact exercise by trained teachers in a class situation. Classes are suitable for all ages and abilities.
Tel: 01403 266000
[thefitnessleague.com](http://thefitnessleague.com)

The National Register of Personal Trainers
Can provide details of registered trainers in your area.
Tel: 01536 425920
[nrpt.co.uk](http://nrpt.co.uk)

Sports Coach UK
An organisation of coaches for all sports.
Tel: 0113 274 4802
[sportscoachuk.org](http://sportscoachuk.org)

The YMCAfit
Offers courses across the UK.
Tel: 020 7343 1850
[ymcafit.org.uk](http://ymcafit.org.uk)
Alexander Technique
The Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique
The largest regulatory body of Alexander Technique teachers.
Tel: 020 8885 6524
alexandertechnique.co.uk

Cycling
British Cycling
Tel: 0161 274 2000
britishcycling.org.uk

Pilates
Body Control Pilates
A list of UK instructors is available on their website.
Tel: 020 7636 8900
bodycontrolpilates.com

Swimming
National Association of Swimming Clubs for the Handicapped
Tel: 01329 833689
nasch.org.uk

Tai Chi
Tai Chi Union for Great Britain
Has a list of registered Tai Chi Union instructors throughout the UK (details online).
Tel: 01403 257918
taichiunion.com

Walking
The British Walking Federation
Promotes non-competitive sports for health and international relations. It has contact details of walking clubs around the UK.
bwf-ivv.org.uk
Yoga

The British Wheel of Yoga
The governing body of yoga.
Tel: 01529 306851
bwy.org.uk

Other exercise

Rebounding
Low-impact action on small trampolines to strengthen with minimal impact.
Tel: 01252 883 871
rebound-uk.com

Aqua Fitness/Aqua Jogging/Aqua Zumba
swimming.org/justswim/
get-fitter/aqua-fitness

Videos/DVDs

Tai Chi for Arthritis
DVD by Dr Paul Lam. Order online:
taichiproductions.com

Fight Back
A home exercise and stretching DVD for people with ankylosing spondylitis. Available for £5 from:
National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society, Unit 0.2, One Victoria Villas, Richmond, Surrey TW9 2GW
Tel: 020 8948 9117
nass.co.uk

Books and leaflets

Exercise and Osteoporosis
This booklet can be ordered from The National Osteoporosis Society, Camerton, Bath BA2 OPJ
Tel: 01761 471 771
nos.org.uk
Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It’s just one of our many publications that are free to anyone who is affected by arthritis. The challenges of living with arthritis are too often overlooked and underestimated. We’re here to change that. Now more than ever we need people like you to lend their time, experience and voice to help others.

Help us improve our information

We know that the people who use our information are the real experts. That’s why we involve them in our work. If you have arthritis you could help us improve our information. You can comment on a variety of information, including booklets and factsheets. If you’d like to know more about becoming a reviewer, email reviewing@arthritiscare.org.uk You can get involved from home whenever you like. You don’t need any special skills, just an interest in our information.

Share your experience

Would you be willing to share your story to help others manage the challenges of living with arthritis? Contact our helpline to speak to someone about getting your story online or in the media.
Raise awareness

Could you help raise awareness of arthritis by putting up posters and leaflets in your local community pharmacy or supermarket? Whether it’s minutes or days, whatever time you can give will really make a difference.

Donate

Arthritis Care and Arthritis Research UK have joined together to help more people live well with arthritis. Read how at arthritisresearchuk.org/merger. All donations will now go to Arthritis Research UK and be used to help people with arthritis live full and active lives in communities across England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

To make a donation all you need to do is visit arthritiscare.org.uk/donate or call us on 020 7380 6540

Thank you
We believe there is always something you can do to reduce the impact of arthritis. Call our free and confidential helpline. Talking about arthritis, sharing your concerns and how you feel, can really help.

There are free publications that you can find on our website or order by post. Or you may prefer to visit our online community where you can chat to others about the things that matter to you.

To find out more about arthritis and Arthritis Care call:

0808 800 4050
(Open weekdays 09:30–17:00)

arthritiscare.org.uk
Twitter: @arthritiscare
Facebook: facebook.com/arthritiscareuk
Instagram: @arthritiscareuk

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Please check our website for up-to-date information and reference sources or call 020 7380 6577.

Arthritis Care is a certified member of The Information Standard. This means that you can be confident that Arthritis Care is a reliable and trustworthy source of health and social care information.