

A photograph of two women in athletic wear standing outdoors and smiling at each other. The woman on the left has reddish-brown hair in a ponytail and is wearing a light blue tank top. The woman on the right has dark brown hair in a ponytail and is wearing a blue tank top. They are both smiling and looking at each other. A large blue circle is overlaid on the bottom right of the image, containing white and yellow text.

**Get moving**  
to keep your joints healthy!

**TIPS FOR EXERCISING SAFELY  
WITH ARTHRITIS**

# The many benefits of exercise

When done safely, there can be many benefits of exercise, including:

- Decreased pain
- Increased bone and muscle strength
- Healthier joints
- Increased range of motion
- Increased ability to perform daily activities
- Increased fitness level
- Improved sleep
- Improved balance
- Decreased risk of falls
- Increased self-confidence and well-being
- Healthier body weight
- Improved ability to manage stress
- Improved posture



## **I exercised before I was diagnosed with arthritis. How will my previous routine be affected?**

Gentle, regular exercises, even at the beginning of your illness, will be important to maintain your mobility and flexibility. You may want to increase your exercises little by little. Remember to start slowly.

If it's been a while since you've been to the gym, you may need to scale back some of your exercises (reducing the weight you use) or modify some of them.

If you have just decided to join a gym, you may need some guidance on what types of exercises to do. A healthcare professional, such as your physiotherapist, would be able to give you guidance on how to get started.



# Ready to get started?

Before you start any exercise routine, there are a few things you should keep in mind:

- Consult with your healthcare professional before starting any exercise program.
  - Set some exercise goals for yourself, but make sure they are within your reach. Be realistic about what you can achieve and be patient. You'll soon see improvements!
  - Work with your healthcare professional to determine how long you should be exercising each day.
  - Start slow and pace yourself. When you start exercising, you may feel pain and stiffness at first. However, there are different kinds of pain: "muscle" pain and "joint" pain. Some muscle pain is normal if you haven't been exercising for a while, but joint pain is not something you should be experiencing. If you think you are having joint pain, speak to your healthcare professional or a physiotherapist.
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- Be sure to listen to your body. Give yourself more rest periods on the days that you exercise.
  - Think about what types of fitness activities you'd like to do and write them down. There are so many options to choose from! It could be one of your goals to try a new one each month, for example.

## What type of shoes should I wear?

If your feet have been affected by arthritis, your first priority should be comfort when it comes to your shoes.

If your feet are swollen, make sure there is enough room in the toe area of the shoes and around the ankle to accommodate the swollen area. A pair of lace-up or Velcro shoes may enable you to better adjust your shoes if you have any swelling.

You should also look for a pair of shoes that provide good support for your heels and arches.

If you have orthotics, be sure to have them with you when you go shopping for new shoes.

If you run or walk, you should buy new shoes after you've done 500 kilometres with the same pair. If you do other types of exercise, you should change your shoes once a year.

You may find that it's uncomfortable to walk in bare feet indoors. If you do, a pair of supportive sandals is a good choice for indoor wear. There are many types of sandals that have arch support and some even have removable insoles to accommodate orthotics.



# Is running a good choice for me?

Running is considered a high-impact exercise. If you are going to run, it's better for you to do it on a treadmill rather than outside on the sidewalk or road.

If your joints are active and sore, it is not recommended for you to run. If you suffer from unstable ligaments, which can occur after having a swollen joint, it's best if you avoid running.

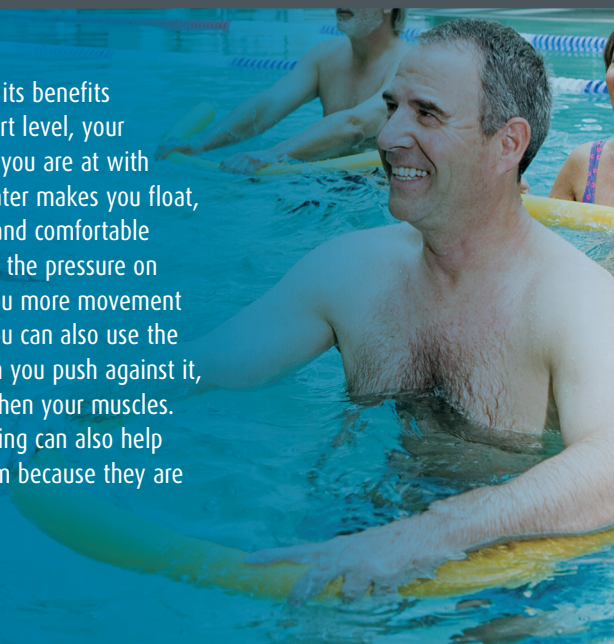
If you are considering running, talk to your physician or physiotherapist first.



# Which is a better choice:

## swimming or going to the gym?

Each type of exercise has its benefits depending on your comfort level, your preference and the stage you are at with your arthritis. Because water makes you float, the pool provides a nice and comfortable environment that reduces the pressure on your joints. This allows you more movement while minimizing pain. You can also use the water for resistance when you push against it, which can help to strengthen your muscles. Aquafit classes or swimming can also help your cardiovascular system because they are aerobic exercises.



Exercises at the gym can also improve your cardiovascular system, your strength and your flexibility. You can decide to work out on your own or you can join the classes offered. Unlike the pool, gym exercise can increase pressure on your joints, which may make it less comfortable initially if you are symptomatic. You are the best judge of what feels good for you.

Once again,  
remember to start slowly  
to keep your progress steady!



## If I go to the gym, what type of machines should I use?

Look for machines that will not create a high impact on your joints (in other words, no pounding on them). An elliptical machine or a stationary bike with no or little resistance might be good options.

A treadmill offers a controlled and safe way to walk, as long as you are not having pain in your joints when using it.

Remember to listen to your body and respect your pain. If you feel pain, use it as a warning sign to slow down or stop the exercise that might not be right for you.

Before using any piece of equipment or machine, make sure you learn how to use it properly. All gym facilities should have someone available to demonstrate how to operate and adjust the equipment to meet your needs.



# What types of exercise classes should I try?

These days there is a wide selection of classes offered at different fitness clubs. Usually a brief description of each class is available for you to read before trying it. Choose the types of classes that interest you, but also look for classes that are low impact.

Make sure you ask questions about the type of class and what is involved. For example: *“What is the ratio of instructors to participants?”* or *“What level is the class? Beginner, intermediate or advanced?”*

If you are new to a particular type of class, choose a beginners’ class to start. Some yoga classes will offer variations in poses for people who have joint problems. Other classes may offer options for people with shoulder or knee problems.

Avoid twisting your joints and bouncing on them if you are sore.

If a one-hour class is too long for you, just stop halfway through and cool down on your own.

A photograph of three women standing outdoors, smiling at the camera. The woman on the left has brown hair and is wearing a white top. The woman in the middle has blonde hair and is wearing a grey hoodie. The woman on the right has blonde hair and is wearing a purple top. They are all looking towards the camera with pleasant expressions.

**Remember  
to listen to your body.**

# Ice or heat?

## When and why should I ice or apply heat to my joints?

After you exercise, see how you feel the next day. Do you have muscle soreness from not having used your muscles for a while (which is normal) or are your joints painful and swollen? If your joints are swollen and painful, you may find that ice helps relieve the discomfort and swelling. However, if you suffer from Raynaud's syndrome (your fingers turn blue and/or white when exposed to cold), you shouldn't apply ice to your hands.

One way to apply ice is to use a bag of frozen corn or peas wrapped in a wet towel. Another way is to use a small frozen bottle of water, which you can rest your fingers on if they are the joints that are bothering you.



Heat can help relieve stiffness and pain when you have no swelling. Applying heat can also help relieve muscle soreness.

You can apply heat or cold for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. If you decide to use an electrical heating pad, ensure that the heat is at a low setting and that you use a timer, as you could burn yourself if you leave it on too long.



# Exercises you can do at home

## Perform this exercise sitting down.

Tilt your head towards one shoulder until you feel the stretch on the opposite site. Hold for approximately 5 seconds. Repeat on the other side.



Repeat

5

times on each side.

## Perform this exercise sitting down.

Turn your head to one side until you feel a stretch. Hold for approximately 5 seconds. Repeat on the other side.



Repeat

5

times on each side.

## Perform this exercise sitting with your back straight.

Pull your chin in, keeping your neck and back straight (not tipping your head forward). Hold at the end position and feel the stretch in your neck.



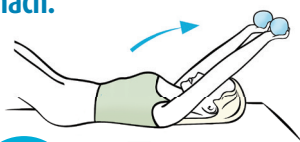
Repeat

10

times.

**Perform this exercise lying on your back on the floor or on a bed with your knees bent. Hold a stick in both hands and rest it on your stomach.**

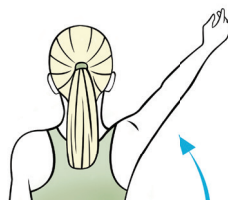
Lift your arms straight up and over your head until you touch the floor or the bed. Hold for up to 10 seconds. Remember to breathe normally. Return to the starting position.



Repeat **10** times.

**Perform this exercise sitting or standing.**

Lift your arm up sideways with your thumb leading the way.



Repeat **10** times on each side.

**Perform this exercise sitting or standing.**

Roll your shoulders in both directions (forwards and backwards).



Repeat **10** times.

**Perform this exercise sitting or standing.**

Keep your upper arms close to your sides and your elbows bent at right angles. Turn your forearms outwards (towards your back).



Repeat **10** times.

# Exercises you can do at home

## Perform this exercise sitting or standing.

With one arm, bring a string or towel over your shoulder and behind your back. Grab hold of the string with the arm to be exercised.

Pull upwards, bringing the lower arm up as far as possible. Hold for approximately 5 seconds. Repeat on the other side with the other arm.



Repeat

10

times.

## Perform this exercise standing.

Bend your elbow and then straighten your elbow.



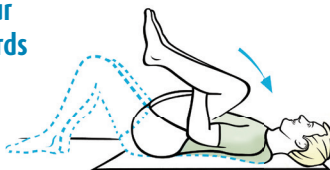
Repeat

10

times on each side.

## Lie down with your knees bent and your feet on the floor. Lift your knees towards your chest.

Place your hands behind both knees and pull them towards your chest. Hold for 5 seconds.



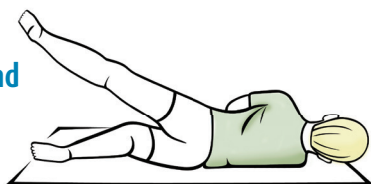
Repeat

10

times.

**Lie down on your side on a bed.  
Keep the leg on the bed bent and  
the upper leg straight.**

Lift the upper leg straight up with your ankle flexed and your heel leading the movement.



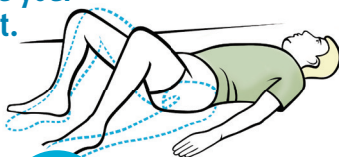
Repeat

**10**

times on each side.

**Lie down with your knees bent and your  
feet on the floor hip distance apart.**

Turn the soles of your feet to face each other and allow your knees to fall outwards. Feel the stretch in your groin. Keep your back flat on the floor during the exercise.



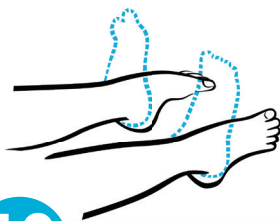
Repeat

**10**

times.

**Perform this exercise lying on your  
back or sitting.**

Bend and straighten your ankles briskly. If you keep your knees straight during the exercise, you will stretch your calf muscles.



Repeat

**10**

times.

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