

INFORMATION

information



VICTORIA

inc. OSTEOPOROSIS VICTORIA

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND EXERCISE

Physical activity plays a vital role in the lives of everyone. It improves general health and well-being and reduces the risk of developing many chronic diseases, such as heart disease, osteoporosis and diabetes. Many people with arthritis are wary of physical activity because they believe that it will increase their pain and further damage their joints. Whilst it is important to be selective in what physical activity you do, all people with arthritis can benefit from regular physical activity.

The benefits

Arthritis is a condition primarily affecting the joints. However if we do not move our joints, it can begin to negatively affect our muscles, bones and other parts of our body and lifestyle.

Maintaining a regular physical activity program will help to:

- Keep your joints mobile and flexible
- Improve your muscle strength
- Improve or maintain your bone strength
- Prevent muscle imbalances and joint deformities
- Nourish your joints
- Improve your balance
- Improve and maintain your ability to perform everyday tasks
- Improve your overall physical and mental health and well-being

Types of physical activity

Any physical activity program focusing on overall health should include exercises for strength, heart and lung fitness, flexibility, and balance and coordination. Different types of physical activity provide different benefits:

- **Strength:** If you are unaccustomed to regular exercise, then most types of physical activity will improve your muscle strength. But in general, any activity that requires your muscles to work with more force than normal will improve your

muscle strength. This includes activities such as weight training, chair based exercise, water exercise, tai chi and walking up stairs/hills. Strength exercises are important for supporting your joints and performance of daily tasks.

- **Flexibility:** Flexibility is the amount of movement our joints have. It is largely determined by the condition of your muscles and joints. Stretching is the best exercise for improving flexibility, but other good activities are chair based exercises, water exercise, tai chi, and yoga. Flexibility exercises are the most important exercises for people with arthritis.
- **Aerobic Fitness:** Aerobic, or heart and lung fitness allows us to perform many of our daily tasks, as well as greatly reduce the risk of developing many chronic conditions. Basically, any exercise that lasts for longer than 5 minutes and that makes us “puff” will be working our aerobic fitness. Activities include walking, jogging, swimming, water exercise, cycling, dancing, and chair aerobics. It is easy to incorporate aerobic exercise into your daily life. For example, you can walk to the shops instead of driving. Or if it is too far to walk, park your car 10 (or more) minutes from the shop and walk from there.
- **Balance and coordination**
Balance and coordination are both influenced by complex interaction of our brain, muscles, nerves, reflexes and body awareness. Flexibility and strength will assist with these fitness components. Possibly the best exercise for improving balance and coordination is tai chi. Other activities include dancing, standing on one leg, and sports requiring good coordination.

Things to consider before starting

- Everybody's arthritis is different and it affects them in different ways. As such, all types of

exercise may not be suitable or beneficial to all people with arthritis.

- Consult your doctor, rheumatologist, physiotherapist or other health professional before starting an exercise program. They will be able to inform you of what types of exercise may not be suitable for you, especially if you have had a joint replacement.
- The most important thing to do to gauge if an activity is suitable is to listen to your body. Pain is a message from your body that something is wrong. If you overdo things and put too much stress on your joints, they will become more painful.
- As a general rule, you have done too much activity if you have exercise-induced pain for more than 2 hours following your session. If this is the case, reduce the intensity and/or the amount of activity for your next session.
- If any activity causes you pain, or increases your pain beyond what is normal, then stop immediately, and refrain from doing this activity. The popular expression of "No pain, no gain" is certainly not the rule to exercise by.
- A hot, swollen and painful joint should not be exercised. You can move it gently through its range of movement a couple of times to help reduce stiffness and improve circulation.
- Try to find an exercise group you can join. Most groups are supervised by appropriately qualified instructors who will understand your condition. As well, exercising in a group is more fun, it enhances motivation, and you get to meet new people!

How can Arthritis Victoria help you?

- The resource centre at Arthritis Victoria has a number of exercise books and videos that you can use at home.
- Arthritis Victoria maintains up to date registers of exercise classes around Victoria that are suitable for people with arthritis. For more information, contact the Telephone Information Service.
- "Move It or Lose It" is Arthritis Victoria's exercise program on Renaissance Television. The program is aimed at people over the age of 50 and screens at 8.30 am Monday to Friday on Channel 31.

- You can join Arthritis Victoria's Warm Water Exercise Program, which operates out of 14 venues across metropolitan Melbourne. For more information contact AV on the number below.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION Resource Centre

- Christensen, Alice (2001), *Arthritis: The powerful program for greater flexibility, strength and freedom*, Twins Streams Kensington Publishing Corp, New York NY.
- Lam, Paul (1997) *Tai chi for arthritis: Dr Paul Lam's 12 easy steps to arthritis relief*, East Acton Video, Narwee, NSW. [Video recording or DVD]
- Lam, Paul and Horstman, Judith (2002), *Overcoming arthritis: A holistic plan including a unique tai chi programme to relieve pain and restore mobility*, Dorling Kindersley, Melbourne.
- *Walk with ease: Your guide to walking for better health, improved fitness and less pain* (2003), Arthritis Foundation of America, Atlanta, GA.
- Westlake, Lisa (2005), *Fitball and pilates unite*, Madman Entertainment. [DVD]

*All listed books and videos are available on loan from the Arthritis Victoria Resource Centre to members. If you would like to find out more about becoming a member, call: (03) 8531 8000.

Courses

AV runs regular exercise leader training courses in Tai Chi for Arthritis, Warm Water Exercise, and Chair Based Exercise. For more information, contact the Physical Activities and Exercise Unit on 8531 8000.

Classes

AV maintains a register of exercise classes throughout Victoria. For more information on classes in your area contact AV on the number below.

ARTHRITIS VICTORIA

If you would like further information please contact our Telephone Information Service
(03) 8531 8000 or
1800 011 041



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Prepared by Education & Services staff, Arthritis Victoria, September 2003. This material is for your information and is not intended to be medical advice. You are encouraged to review the information provided with your doctor or relevant health professional.