

## Top Ten Reasons Why Arthritis Sufferers Should Exercise

“Unfortunately, many arthritis sufferers mistakenly believe that exercise will worsen their condition,” said Dr. Cedric Bryant, chief exercise physiologist for ACE. “The reality, however, is that a well-rounded physical activity program of stretching, strength training and aerobic exercise can help minimize many of the adverse affects of arthritis and improve overall functional capacity.”

1. Flexibility training helps improve range of motion and reduces stiffness in afflicted joints, particularly the early-morning stiffness often associated with arthritis.
2. Aerobic exercise, particularly low-impact activities such as walking, not only improves overall fitness, but also helps reduce the psychological and emotional pain that often accompanies arthritis.
3. Strength training exercises help build muscle strength, enhance joint stability, and improve mobility making easier to perform activities of daily living.
4. Weight-bearing (e.g., walking) or weight-loading (e.g., strength training) exercise positively affect bone mass, helping to reduce the risk of developing osteoporosis, a degenerative bone disease that is often seen in people with arthritis due to their reduced levels of physical activity.
5. Arthritis can negatively affect posture, balance and coordination, all of which may be improved by regular exercise.



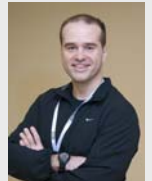
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### TIPS FROM THE TRAINER

Tom Irving

Wellness Specialist

NSCA-CPT



Whenever designing comprehensive fitness programs for my clients I always include flexibility training or stretching. Experience has taught me that it truly can make or break a successful exercise program.

A well designed stretching program can help increase you pain free range of motion, improve posture, enhance function and decrease muscle tension. Typically we take a head to toe approach emphasizing all the major muscle groups. Most stretching is performed after a proper warm up or post workout. As the old saying goes “Warm up to stretch, don’t stretch to warm up.”

Flexibility or lack there of can be a limiting factor for many in regards to performing there activities of daily living at the level they would like. The great part about stretching is the time requirement is quite minimal. You can see large improvements with just 5-10 minutes of stretching 2-3 days a week. It’s highly recommended that one seek out the help of a professional to get there flexibility assessed and then have a program developed based on the results of the assessment.

## Exercising Safely with Arthritis

Before beginning any type of exercise program, talk it over with your physician. He or she may have some specific concerns or considerations you should keep in mind. Once you begin a program, the primary goal is to improve functional capacity to help reduce pain and fatigue associated with activities of daily living. A secondary focus is to improve physical fitness.

Start your exercise program with a goal to improve flexibility. Try to move your joints through their full range of motion at least once per day, holding the stretch for at least 30 seconds. Take your time with these exercises and never stretch to the point of pain or discomfort. By focusing on flexibility, you reduce your risk of injury and limber up the joints that have been stiffened by arthritis. Your physical therapist or trainer can help you to choose the most effective stretches for you.

Progress to strengthening exercises to improve muscular endurance. Depending on the severity of your arthritis, your physician or physical therapist may suggest either isometric or isotonic exercises. Isometric exercise, such as pushing one palm against the other, involves contracting the muscle without moving the joint. Isotonic exercise, such as a biceps curl, involves contracting the muscle while moving one or more joints. These exercises can be done easily with weights, elastic tubing or exercise bands. Engage in resistance-training activities two to three times per week. Your muscles need time to recover and repair, so take at least one day off in between strength-training workouts. Be careful not to lift too much, too soon. Take your time and build up gradually.

Once you've developed a flexibility and resistance-training routine, incorporate aerobic activity. Cardiovascular exercise programs reduce pain and morning stiffness and improve walking speed and balance. Aim for participating in cardiovascular exercise such as walking, swimming or bicycling three to five times per week. As with strength training, start aerobic exercise slowly and progress gradually.

Depending on your current fitness level, you may want to start with as little as two minutes of activity three times a day and work your way up to a single 20-minute session three to five times per week.

Finish every workout with stretching, choosing exercises that minimize the stress on the most painful joints.

## Do What Works for You

Many people with arthritis can excel in a community-based fitness program under the guidance of a knowledgeable and experienced instructor or trainer, such as an ACE-certified Advanced Health & Fitness Specialist with a special interest in helping individuals with arthritis. Others may benefit more from a rehabilitation program with a physical therapist. The key is to find what works best for you to adopt a safe, effective and fun exercise program that will set you on your way to greater mobility and better health.