

Stay active despite arthritis pain

Living with arthritis pain when you're active is not easy to accept; sometimes getting through even the easiest of daily tasks can be challenging. If you are experiencing flare-ups, stiffness, or restricted movement, it's tempting to do nothing, and hope that tomorrow will be a better day.

If you are dealing with arthritis pain, you are not alone: arthritis affects approximately four million Canadians. The good news is that there is much you can do to improve your quality of life.

"An important first step is to consult your physician to determine how your arthritis can best be managed," says Claire Moscone, a certified athletic therapist, who works with arthritis patients. "Working with your physician to control pain and inflammation is the number one priority."

There are many effective medications available to treat arthritis. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as ASA (acetylsalicylic acid), ibuprofen and naproxen are commonly used. New analgesic anti-inflammatories known as coxibs, like the recently approved Bextra, have been shown to provide effective relief of arthritis pain, and are a good option.

"Arthritis responds well to appropriate exercise," Moscone adds. "Exercise can improve your endurance, strength, and overall flexibility, and is an important part of an overall program geared to a better quality of life."

Your doctor may want to refer you to a physical or athletic therapist who can design a program based on your needs. The assessment would likely include an

overall determination of your joint stability, stiffness, and pain, and take into consideration any other factors (for example, joint replacement). A therapist can also help you conserve motion and find new and better ways of doing old, perhaps painful, tasks.

Moscone suggests the following as common-sense guidelines to follow when beginning any exercise program:

- Get your doctor's okay, and choose activities in line with your interests and abilities.
 - Go slow! Doing too much too quickly can lead to discouragement or, worse, injury.
 - Work with a professional to ensure your program is right for you, and that you are working at a level appropriate for you.
 - Begin with a good warm-up. This involves a good stretching regimen.
 - Try to include range-of-motion, strengthening and endurance exercises for a complete workout.
 - If you experience any pain or problems, stop and ask your doctor or therapist to help you locate the reason.
 - Take time to cool down properly after you exercise.
- If a formal exercise program isn't right for you, there are a lot of simple, inexpensive activities you can undertake. Try activities and sports you enjoy that don't aggravate your arthritis. Start with non-weight-bearing activities such as swimming or biking. If you don't experience any pain, you can progress to weight bearing activities like walking, gardening or jogging.

—News Canada

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