

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY + ARTHRITIS



Arthritis is defined as inflammation of the joint. For many older adults, joint pain may sound like a reason to avoid physical activity, but the opposite is true! In addition to the numerous health benefits, being physically active—with the right kinds of activity—can actually help manage arthritis pain.

Here are some key things to keep in mind when getting active with arthritis:



Even though you may be enthusiastic about getting active, a common problem is taking on too much, too soon. Gradually increase the duration and intensity or complexity of your movements. Avoid rapid or repetitive movements of your affected joints. Choose activities that protect your joints and avoid activities with jumping, rapid twisting, turning or sudden stops, as they are stressful to your knees and spine. You may want to consider purchasing special shoes or orthotics for extra support and shock absorption.



Joints affected by arthritis may be unstable or have restricted range of motion because of pain, stiffness or swelling. Be kind to these joints and don't push their limits, as they are at higher risk for injury. The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend choosing a variety of activities from the following three groups: endurance, strength and flexibility. Flexibility activities are particularly important for older adults with arthritis, because they help maintain or restore normal joint movement and relieve stiffness.

## POPULAR ENDURANCE ACTIVITIES FOR OLDER ADULTS WITH ARTHRITIS INCLUDE:



### Walking

Walking is a great activity for older adults with arthritis because it doesn't put a lot of stress on your joints. Faster walking speeds do increase joint stress, so you should keep your speed in line with your body's ability. Walking is inexpensive and can be done anytime, anywhere—all you need is good pair of shoes. If your arthritis affects your hip, knee, ankle or foot joints, you should check with your healthcare provider.



### Water Activities

Get active in the water and your joints will appreciate it. Water supports your body weight and adds resistance, which also enhances muscle strength and endurance. There are therapeutic pools that are specifically designed for people with arthritis that are kept at warm temperatures, which will help to loosen you up. These pools are also equipped with accessible ramps to make it easier to get in and out.



## Cycling

Cycling is a great indoor or outdoor activity for older adults with arthritis. When starting out, keep the resistance down and don't pedal too hard. For those with back pain, try a recumbent bicycle. A recumbent bicycle lets you sit back, supported by a full seat with your legs in front of you in a horizontal position. This position puts less stress on your back than a conventional bicycle.

Physical activity is safe and enjoyable for older adults with arthritis, but it is important to know your limits. While it's normal to experience some discomfort when being active, sharp pain or more pain than usual are warning signs that something is wrong. Listen to your body.

Remember that before you start any new type of physical activity, check with your doctor or health professional to see if it is right for you.



### For more information:

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**“ I have been attending water aerobics at the Gander Arts and Culture Swimming Pool for about eight years. There are six generations of arthritics in my family and I realize how important it is to keep active. Since I've been involved in water aerobics, I have more flexibility in my fingers and toes. The water acts as a buffer and I have a larger range of motion in the water environment and less stiffness in my knees and hips. We make the sessions fun for everybody and after 45 minutes of exercises, everyone feels rejuvenated and looks forward to the next session. There is one lady in our group who is over 75 years old who told me “I feel 10 yrs. younger after I come to these sessions!” ”**

**Jeanne** 72 years of age, Gander, Water Aerobics Leader