



Exercise Rx for Arthritis: Help your patients find their “FITT”

F= Frequency I= Intensity T=Time T=Type

The benefits of physical activity for arthritis¹

Physical activity is important for managing osteoarthritis (OA) pain, as well as other chronic conditions that commonly occur among adults with OA. Some of the benefits of physical activity for people with OA may include **improvements** in:¹⁻³

- Pain and stiffness
- Range of motion
- Heart health
- Muscle strength
- Weight management
- Joint stability and balance⁴
- Mood
- Ability to perform daily tasks
- Absenteeism⁵ (missed days of work)
- Presenteeism⁵ (reduced productivity at work)

Physical activity recommendations

The physical activity recommendations for people with arthritis generally follow the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans;⁶ however, they should be tailored to patients’ abilities, health, interests, past experiences, geography, and other personal factors.⁷ Providers can help patients find their “FITT” by mutually developing a plan that includes the following recommendations:¹

	F	Frequency: Start low and go slow, particularly if patients are not currently exercising; gradually increase frequency as they become stronger and more confident. However, the goal for patients should be to move more every day. ¹
	I	Intensity: Provide examples such as being able to “ <i>talk</i> ” but not “ <i>sing</i> ” while performing moderate activity, or not being able to say more than a few words at a time during vigorous exercise. ¹
	T	Time: Aim for a weekly goal of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity. If patients have a low fitness level and/or experience pain when exercising, recommend starting with 3-5 minute sessions 2 times a day. ¹
	T	Type: Engage in a combination of aerobic (3-5 days a week), strengthening (2 days a week), and balance/flexibility (3 days a week) exercises. ⁶

Joint-friendly Activity Suggestions^{1,6,8}

SWIMMING OR WATER AEROBICS	WALKING	BIKING	GROUP EXERCISE	RESISTANCE MACHINES AND BANDS	YOGA	TAI CHI	LIGHT GARDENING	DANCING	HOUSEHOLD CHORES	SIMPLY FINDING WAYS TO BE MORE ACTIVE THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Warning signs to share with patients - sharp, stabbing or constant pain; pain that interferes with daily activities; pain that lasts more than 2 hours after exercise; pain or swelling that does not improve with rest, pain medications or heat/cold treatments; increased swelling/redness in joints.¹

Talking with patients about lifestyle changes

Providers can draw from motivational interviewing (MI) to help guide patients—particularly those who feel stuck or unsure about changing their habits—through the process of setting health behavior goals, such as increasing their physical activity level. You don't have to be an expert to implement some of the elements of MI. Use “OARS” to remember these basic skills of MI:⁹



O

Open-ended Questions: Avoid yes/no questions when gathering information from patients.⁹

A

Affirmations: Identify and comment on patient's positive behaviors and comments that speak to the quality of the patient's character and commitment to health.⁹

R

Reflections: Reflect back a short description of what you heard the patient say; this conveys respect, interest, and curiosity.⁹

S

Summary: Organize what the patient has told you into a succinct summary bringing together what the person has been saying.⁹

Motivational Interviewing principles⁹ that can help you support your patients' efforts to be physically active:

Expressing Empathy	I can imagine that it is challenging to find the time to exercise.
Recognizing Discrepancies	However, I hear that you understand the importance of exercise.
Rolling with Resistance	If 3 days a week is too much, what sounds like a reasonable number of days to exercise?
Supporting Self-Efficacy	It's great to hear that you feel like 1 day a week is realistic and that you want to start tomorrow. I am impressed with your dedication to your health.



Visit www.oacaretools.org to find more resources for providers and individuals on managing arthritis and finding local arthritis programs in the community.

OAAA collaborated with Pfizer in the development of this resource.

References

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