

Getting Started with Physical Activity for Arthritis

Physical activity is one strategy for managing pain from osteoarthritis (OA).¹ It helps increase strength, range of motion, and stability in joints.² It may also help improve your function and your ability to manage your weight and other health conditions like heart disease and diabetes.³

Ok, physical activity may help reduce OA pain, but what type of movement is best?

Where do you start?

Talk to your doctor about an exercise program that may be right for you. Then get started with these 2 basic steps:

- 1 Learn what counts as physical activity
- 2 Set SMART goals to add more activity in your day safely and effectively

1 Find your “FITT”: Learn what counts as physical activity



Frequency: Start low and go slow, particularly if you have not been exercising. **Gradually increase frequency** as you become stronger and more confident. However, the goal should be to **move more every day**.⁴



Intensity: Measure how hard you are working with the [talk test](#). You should be able to **“talk” but not “sing”** during moderate activity.⁴



Time: Aim for a weekly goal of **150 minutes of moderate aerobic** activity. Try breaking this time into shorter blocks of activity if necessary.⁴



Type: Mix it up! Do 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^{4,5,6}

- Biking
- Dancing
- Light Gardening
- Group exercise
- Household chores
- Resistance machines and bands
- Swimming
- Tai chi
- Walking
- Water aerobics
- Yoga
- Simply finding ways to be more active throughout the day

CAUTION If you experience these symptoms, talk to a healthcare provider about your exercise program: 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.⁴

Check out this [online guide](#) to custom-“FIIT” an exercise plan based on your current level of physical activity.

2 Set SMART goals to add more activity into your day safely and effectively

The next step is setting SMART goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound. You can use the FITT guidelines above, or you can use your own personal metrics to write your SMART goals.

Use the worksheet on the other side to make physical activity goals for yourself.

References

1. Kolasinski SL, et al. *Arthritis Care Res (Hoboken)*. 2020; 72(2):149-162.
2. Bennell KL, et al. *Best Pract Res Clin Rheumatol*. 2014;28(1):93-117.
3. Osteoarthritis Action Alliance, et al. *National Public Health Agenda for Osteoarthritis: 2020 Update*. 2020.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Physical Activity for Arthritis*. 2018.
5. Nelson AE, et al. *Semin Arthritis Rheum*. 2014;43(6):701-712.
6. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2018.
7. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. *Enhancing Motivation for Change in Substance Abuse Treatment*. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 1999. (Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 35.)

My Physical Activity Goals



Example :

Goal: Walk for 15 minutes, 3 times per week, for the next two weeks

I will do it: After dinner on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday

Possible challenges and solutions: If it is too dark to walk outside, I will walk inside my house

What resources I need to meet this goal: Good walking shoes, water bottle, a friend/family member

Week #	Goal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will you do? • When will you do it? • How might you address any challenges? • What resources do you need? 	Why is this important to you?	How confident are you that you can achieve this goal?*
			0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
			0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
			0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
			0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
			0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
			0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*When deciding which goal to work on first, begin with the one that you have the most confidence you can achieve (closest to a 10). If you have any goals where your confidence is below a 7, consider changing that goal to make it more realistic or saving it for later.⁷

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