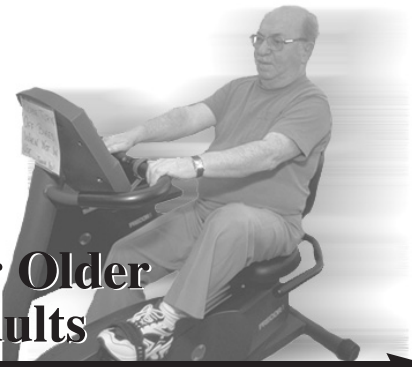




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# Active Living Tips for Older Adults

Practical and leading edge knowledge on healthy living presented in plain language.

## Active Living Helps Arthritis

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Research References  
are available on the  
ALCOA website at  
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**This information  
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The Arthritis Society  
www.arthritis.ca  
1-800-321-1433



ARTHRITIS HEALTH  
PROFESSIONS ASSOCIATION  
www.ahpa.ca



Canadian Centre  
for Activity and Aging  
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Millions of older Canadians – both men and women – suffer from the pain, stiffness, and swelling caused by arthritis. The pain can slow you down and limit your movements. When you move around less, your muscles get weaker, and it becomes more challenging to steady and balance yourself. Arthritis can also aggravate other physical problems you may have, such as osteoporosis.

Sadly, many people do not seek treatment for arthritis because they think that they just have to cope with the condition and endure the pain. This is not true. There are drugs available that help to slow arthritis down and manage the pain. Early diagnosis and treatment of arthritis is important. Once you get the disease under control, you can start being more physically active.



Research shows that regular, gentle, physical activity will not only make you

stronger – it will also help you better manage the pain and stiffness.

### Start With a Visit to Your Doctor

See your family doctor about your arthritis if you have not already done so. Your doctor should get a complete picture of your health before prescribing drugs or any other form of treatment to help manage the pain and stiffness and to limit the progression of the disease. Give your doctor all the information you can about any other medication you take, allergies, and past illnesses. If medications are necessary, your doctor will probably begin with low dose medications and will monitor you carefully to make sure that your body can cope.

### The benefits of regular physical activity

People with arthritis will frequently decrease their activity because they are afraid of aggravating the disease. But researchers have found that the right kind of regular physical activity actually reduces pain and does not damage the joints. Regular physical activity helps to keep muscles strong, builds bone mass, and controls weight. All of these things mean that you will cope better with arthritis and will be better able to live independently.

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Regular physical activity has emotional benefits too. It helps you to feel relaxed, energetic, and good about yourself. Even if you have not been active for a long time, regular physical activity will benefit you now. In fact, research shows that people who were the least active before were the first to see gains once they started. They also enjoyed the greatest health benefits over time.

## What Kind of Activity is Good for Someone With Arthritis?

You should talk to your doctor and other health care professionals, such as a physiotherapist, to help you decide on a well-rounded program. This program should include:

- stretching movements to keep muscles and joints flexible
- gentle, pain free movement of the joints
- balance activities
- muscle strengthening activities
- aerobic activities for your heart and lungs
- fun activities you like to do or would like to try.

Low impact physical activity is best for people with arthritis. Swimming is a good choice, because the water supports your joints. Jogging puts too much pressure on leg joints, and contact sports are not recommended.

The traditional Chinese exercise, tai chi, is an enjoyable group or individual activity that improves strength, balance, flexibility, and mobility. Many community centres offer classes.

Walking is excellent for strengthening hip muscles, especially when you walk on soft surfaces like grass or woodchip paths. Cross-country skiing and golf are also good choices for many people. Hand exercises can help you to strengthen your grasp and improve coordination in fingers damaged by arthritis. Weight training is also an option as long as you avoid jarring movements and keep your movements in the pain free range.

Aerobic workouts are an option as long as they are low-impact.

## Physical Activity Tips

- Warm up for 5 to 10 minutes with "stretch and hold" movements before you go into your main exercise program.
- Cool down with 5 minutes of "stretch and hold" movements at the end.
- Set a goal of 10 minutes of moderate physical activity to start with. If you can't do 10 minutes when you start out, do what you can and work up to the 10 minute mark.
- Gradually build up the time till you can accumulate between 30 and 60 minutes most days of the week.
- Some people find that heat or cold applied to an arthritic joint before or after exercise is helpful.
- Wear the right kind of footwear for your activity program, and make sure the shoes are comfortable and provide support.

Getting physically active is a great way for you to join the fight against arthritis and take charge of your own good health.



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