

# Benefits of Exercise for Osteoarthritis

Physical activity is the best non-drug treatment for improving pain and function in OA.

While you may worry that exercising with osteoarthritis could harm your joints and cause more pain, research shows that people can and should exercise when they have osteoarthritis. In fact, exercise is considered the most effective non-drug treatment for reducing pain and improving movement in patients with osteoarthritis.

## What Exercises Work Best for Osteoarthritis?

Each of the following types of exercises plays a role in maintaining and improving the ability to move and function:

**Range of motion or flexibility exercises.** Range of motion refers to the ability to move your joints through the full motion they were designed to achieve. These exercises include gentle stretching and movements that take joints through their full span. Doing these exercises regularly can help maintain and improve joint flexibility.

**Aerobic/endurance exercise.** These exercises strengthen the heart and make the lungs more efficient. This conditioning also reduces fatigue and builds stamina. Aerobic exercise also helps control weight by increasing the amount of calories the body uses. Aerobic exercises include walking, jogging, bicycling, swimming or using the elliptical machine.

**Strengthening exercises.** These exercises help maintain and improve muscle strength. Strong muscles can support and protect joints affected by arthritis. Two types of exercise are particularly good for most people with osteoarthritis.

**Walking.** It is (usually) free, it is easy on the joints and it comes with a host of benefits. One major plus is that it improves circulation – and wards off heart disease, lowers blood pressure and strengthens the heart. It lowers the risk of fractures (by stopping or slowing down the loss of bone mass) and tones muscles that support joints.

## Bottom Line

Multiple studies show mild to moderate exercise is beneficial for people with arthritis. However, everyone's circumstances are different, so discussing exercise with your doctor is important. Together with your doctor and/or physical therapist and fitness professional you can design an exercise plan that is best for you.

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