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ADULT HEALTH BULLETIN

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K-State Research & Extension
Atchison County Office
405 Main/PO Box 109
Effingham, KS 66023
913-833-5450
www.atchison.ksu.edu

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: ARTHRITIS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

There are over 100 forms of arthritis, but the most common form is osteoarthritis. According to the Arthritis Foundation, an estimated 21 million Americans live with osteoarthritis.

How does Arthritis Affect the Joints?

In osteoarthritis, the cartilage covering the ends of the bones, at the joints, decreases. As bone begins to rub against bone, pain and reduced movement can result.

How does Arthritis Affect Activity Levels?

The pain of arthritis might keep you from physical activities. Lack of movement can add to stiff joints and reduce the ability to move comfortably. Regular movement can keep the joints more flexible. Strengthening the muscles helps them support and protect the joints. The addition of physical activity to the treatment plan you are receiving from your doctor can help with everyday activities. It may help to prevent joint damage.

Can Individuals with Arthritis Participate in Physical Activity?

Yes. The type of physical activity that is right for you depends on the type of arthritis



you have and the severity of your condition. It is very important to seek the guidance of a physician and physical therapist to develop a program right for you. The main risk of physical activity is usually the chance of aggravating your arthritis by exercising too long or too hard. This is why it is very important to start slowly and follow a program designed just for you.

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Continued on the back →

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

A balanced exercise program should include:

- Flexibility or range-of-motion training
 - Stretching
- Resistance training
 - Weights, resistance bands, and exercise tubes
- Endurance training
 - Walking, biking, and dancing

If pain, stiffness, and weakness are a problem, you may want to begin only with flexibility and resistance training. Endurance training can be added as it becomes easier to do flexibility and resistance training. To gradually include endurance activities such as walking or biking, begin by adding 5 minutes, 3 times a day, for a total of 15 minutes. Time should gradually be added to reach a goal of 30 minutes a day most days of the week.

Here are some general guidelines for physical activity with arthritis:

- Reduce pain and swelling by applying treatment to the areas involved in the activity
- Include a 10 to 15 minute warm-up
- Wear comfortable clothing and shoes designed for physical activity with shock absorbent soles to reduce the stress on joints
- Stop if you feel any pain during activity
- Gently rub and stretch muscle pains or cramps until pain is gone
- Cool down and gently stretch for at least 10 minutes after activity

The Benefits of Water Aerobics

Arthritis can affect the joints in different ways. Pain in the leg joints might prevent walking as a form of endurance activity. Water aerobics is a popular form of endurance activity for arthritis patients. Access to a pool

year round might be a problem, but a temperature controlled pool can be great value to someone with arthritis.

- Warm water can raise body temperature and increase circulation.
- Water provides a gentle environment for exercising the joints and muscles versus the stress of the feet pounding on pavement.
- Water supports body weight, putting less stress on joints during movement.
- Water can act as a form of resistance to strengthen muscle, and provide a gentle increase in intensity.



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SOURCES:

Arthritis Foundation. The Facts About Arthritis, Exercise and Your Arthritis, Water Exercise. All available online at www.arthritis.org

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Written by: Travonia Brown-Hughes, Ph.D., MCH Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Kentucky HEEL program

Edited by: Connee Wheeler

Designed by: Rusty Manseau