

## Exercises for people with arthritis

There are many different forms of arthritis but osteoarthritis is the most common form. Invariably, it leads to the development of stiff and painful joints.

The weight-bearing joints such as the hips, knees, ankles, neck and lower spine are the most frequently affected areas. The fingers, thumbs and big toes can also be severely affected.

Regular exercise is extremely important in managing osteoarthritis. Without exercise, the joints become increasingly stiff and difficult to move and the muscles will become weak. Most people with arthritis can participate safely in regular exercise programmes. A combination of stretching, aerobics and strength-training activities can be quite therapeutic in the management of arthritis.

### Relax tight muscles

Mild stretching should be performed prior to aerobic exercises to relax tight muscles. A regular flexibility programme following aerobic exercises is encouraged to help maintain good joint mobility. Avoid high-impact activities because they may cause trauma to arthritic joints. Low-impact activities such as swimming, water aerobics or cycling can be enjoyed and easily tolerated by arthritic individuals.

Exercise helps preserve muscle strength and joint mobility. Better strength, endurance and flexibility will improve your ability to walk and perform daily activities. The exercise prescription should be developed on the basis of the functional status of the individual. Avoid exercises that involve quick and excessive movements.

Always start your exercise sessions at low intensity or resistance and build up gradually, as you become more tolerant to the exercise. The exercises will become easier as you exercise more frequently. If you experience pain while exercising, reduce the intensity and duration. Vary the exercises that you participate in and extend both the warm-up and cool-down segments.

### Poor posture

Your exercise routine should put all joints through a range of motion at least once a day to maintain mobility. Adhere to the correct mechanics or body alignment during the exercise routine. Poor posture decreases joint mobility and strength development. Awkward movements increase energy expenditure so you will experience fatigue more quickly.

Pain is a normal symptom in arthritic people. However, you should not persist with an exercise beyond a tolerable pain threshold. Simple movements for healthy individuals can be quite painful for individuals with arthritis. Avoiding exercise when your arthritis flares up will prevent more discomfort.