

Physical activity and Rheumatoid

Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by the skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure above resting levels.

It includes exercises, sports and physical activities done as part of daily living.



Exercise is a planned, structured and repetitive physical activity that has the objective to improve or maintain physical fitness.

Benefits of regular physical activity

- Recommendations for the general population is for
 - 150 minutes per week of moderate- intensity aerobic activity or
 - 75 minutes per week of vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise.
- While there are no published guidelines on physical activity in patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA), it is generally recommended that RA patients should target moderate to vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise (60-80% of the maximal heart rate) combined with a self-exercise program.
- Research studies have shown that low levels of physical activity can be associated with higher levels of RA disease activity.
- Regular physical activity will
 - Decrease the risk for developing RA and the severity of RA.
 - Reduce the risk for heart disease.
 - Will help maintain and improve bone health and therefore decrease risk for osteoporosis.
 - Decrease pain perception.
 - Decrease sense of fatigue.
 - Improve mood.
 - Improve sleep.
 - Help maintain or lose weight and thereby reduce risk for other medical conditions such as diabetes.
 - Improve balance.



What types of physical activity/ exercises?

- Range of motion and stretching exercises
 - Helps improve posture and function and reduce risk for injuries
- Resistance training
 - Involves repeatedly performing exercises specifically designed to increase muscle strength by gradually increasing the resistance to movements.
 - Helps build muscles and improve function; reduces bone loss.
- Aerobic exercises
 - Involve the use of large muscle and seek to increase peak oxygen consumption by elevating the heart rate to 50-80% of the maximum heart rate. Also improves lung and muscle function and with helps with weight control.
 - Can relieve pain, improve function and decrease joint damage.
 - Walking, dancing, aquatic exercises and cycling.
- Body awareness
 - Activities that improve posture, balance joint position and relaxation.
 - Yoga, Tai Chi



Starting an exercise program



- Start slowly with few, low intensity exercises and build up intensity and duration of exercise regimen, as tolerated.
- Set realistic goals and reward yourself when you achieve it. Allow time for rest.
- Discuss with your PCP and rheumatologist. In some cases it may be a good idea to see a cardiologist before starting an exercise program.
- A physical therapist and occupation therapist can help guide you to the proper type of exercises.
- Exercising with friends or family member can help you stay motivated.

Resources

- American College of Rheumatology: <https://www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver/Diseases-Conditions/Living-Well-with-Rheumatic-Disease/Exercise-and-Arthritis>
- Arthritis Foundation: [Best Exercises for Rheumatoid Arthritis | Arthritis Foundation](https://www.arthritis.org/experts-best-practices/exercises/rheumatoid-arthritis)