

ARTHRITIS

EXERCISES TO KEEP YOU MOVING



ARTHRITIS
NEW ZEALAND

ENABLING A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

KAIPONAPONA AOTEAROA
Te whakapiki i te kounga ora



PHYSIOTHERAPY NEW ZEALAND
Kōmiri Aotearoa



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ARTHRITIS: Exercises to keep you moving

If you have arthritis, the thought of starting an exercise programme while experiencing pain, stiffness, and fatigue can be extremely daunting. It can be easy to get discouraged, particularly if your arthritis is severe.

However, exercise is a vital part of an effective self-management plan. Studies show regular and appropriate physical activity helps improve pain tolerance, mood and quality of life for people with arthritis.

Exercise can help you:

- reduce joint pain and stiffness
- increase flexibility and range of movement
- build stronger and healthier muscles, bones and cartilage
- relieve tension
- control swelling
- manage your weight
- improve your heart and lung function
- sleep better
- reduce tiredness, anxiety or depression
- reduce the risk of dangerous falls
- improve your posture.

An effective treatment plan may include a combination of exercise, proper use of medications, a balance of rest and relaxation, a healthy diet, joint protection techniques and strategies to conserve energy.

The exercises in this guide are to help people with arthritis or a rheumatology condition which is affecting their joints or muscles. The exercises help you maintain or improve your ability to do everyday tasks.

You can use this guide to help select the appropriate exercise or activity when talking to your health professional about exercise. When you're ready, your health professional can help you to increase your exercise if you wish.



PICKING THE BEST EXERCISE OPTIONS

What kind of activities do you enjoy?

- Outdoor (e.g. walking, gardening)
- Indoor (e.g. table tennis, weights)
- Group (e.g. dancing, lawn bowls)
- Water (e.g. swimming, fishing)
- Sports (e.g. net ball, jogging)

Which area of your body limits your physical activity?

- Neck or shoulders
- Wrists, hands or fingers
- Hips or knees
- Lower or middle back
- Ankles, feet or toes

Tips

- Ask your GP to recommend suitable exercise, especially if you have had joint replacements. A physiotherapist can ensure you have been properly assessed and that your exercises are appropriate.
- To make sure you don't cause a flare-up, progress gradually and only do exercises suited to your condition.
- Continue meeting with your physiotherapist to review and improve your technique or to make changes to your exercise routine, if needed.
- Try to exercise three or four times each week.
- Write down your short and long-term goals. A physiotherapist or occupational therapist can help you set realistic goals.
- Try to develop a programme that will keep you interested and motivated.
- Make sure to maintain a balance between rest and exercise.
- Use the right equipment, for example supportive, shock-absorbing shoes.
- Work within your limits and don't ignore pain. Pain relief medication can mask the symptoms of over exertion. If you have pain for more than two hours after exercise, please speak to your health professional. It may have been the wrong type of exercise or you may have used the wrong technique.
- Always try to maintain good posture, especially when exercising.



MANAGING A FLARE-UP

The definition of “flare-up” is a temporary worsening of the disease process. If you have arthritis, you’ve probably experienced a flare-up at some stage. Your disease may seem to be well under control for a while, and then suddenly your joints become inflamed and painful. You may feel unwell and over-tired.

While you’re experiencing a flare-up, we advise against doing exercises that put extra load or added exertion on the affected limb or joint, as this could make things worse.

We recommend you protect the affected joint by using a splint or other support, and avoid adding any strain or increase in weight. However, if pain and swelling allow, try to maintain the range of movement in the joint.

It’s important to use appropriate pain relief medication while experiencing a flare-up. You may need to consult your GP, rheumatologist or registered nurse.

Once the flare-up has settled, try to return to normal levels of activity. Long periods of inactivity or reduced movement leads to decreased strength, increased stiffness and faster deterioration of the joints.

Simple tips for managing an acute flare-up

- **A COLD PACK** sometimes provides relief. You can buy one from a chemist or you can use a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp tea towel as a cold pack. Place the bag over the affected part for 10-15 minutes, 2 to 4 times a day to reduce swelling or heat. This is not recommended for people with Reynaud’s phenomenon.

- **RELAXATION TECHNIQUES** can be an effective way to reduce long-term physical tension. While some muscle tension is normal, extreme tension is not, and relaxation can help you cope with stress and pain.

One simple relaxation technique is focusing on your **BREATHING**. Breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth can encourage deep, slow, regular breathing. Take your breaths from

your abdomen rather than your chest, and it may help to count while you breathe. Breathe in, count 1, 2, breathe out, count 3, 4, 5.

- You can speak to your registered health professional to find suitable relaxation strategies.

- **PROTECT YOUR JOINTS** - When planning exercise and daily activities, make sure you protect your joints. Joint protection is about using your body in different ways to reduce the amount of stress on sore joints.

- **CONSERVE ENERGY** - Make sure you respect pain. If you feel pain during an activity, stop and take a rest. If you still feel pain 2 hours after doing an activity, you’ve done too much.



Other tips to help you conserve energy during a flare-up

- **PLAN** – Write down a plan for your day and include rest periods. Consider your energy levels and plan your most active tasks for when you have the most energy. Try to alternate light and heavy activities.
- **PRIORITISE** – While writing your plan, rank the importance of your day's tasks. If an activity is low on the list, let it go!
- **PACE** – Pace yourself and incorporate rest periods in between activities. Spread your workload out into manageable bites, rather than trying to tackle all your tasks at once.
- **PROTECTION** – Do your best to avoid strain or staying in the same position for too long.
- **POSTURE** – Maintaining good posture helps conserve energy, while bad posture will make you feel more tired. Consider how you're holding your body when sitting, standing, doing exercise and other activities.

WAYS TO MAINTAIN GOOD POSTURE

Sitting

- Find a chair that supports your back and lets your feet sit comfortably on the ground.
- Sit evenly on both buttocks without slumping forward or to one side.
- Keep your feet in a line with knees and your knees in line with hips.
- Lift your chest and maintain the natural curve in the lower back.
- Lengthen the back of your neck and bring your chin towards the front of your neck.

Standing

- Put weight equally on both feet without favouring one side.
- Soften your knees.
- Lengthen your upper back and draw your shoulder blades back.
- Tighten your lower abdominal muscles.

Lifting and bending

- Position your feet firmly on the ground, feet apart.
- Position your hips and pelvis as if you are going to sit down on a chair.
- Try and bend from your hips and knees, keeping your back straight.



TYPES OF EXERCISE

There are three main types of exercise:

- Aerobic: to increase your general fitness level
- Strengthening: to make the muscles stronger
- Stretching: to stop you getting stiff.
-

Aerobic

This type of exercise can fit around your usual routine for 20-30 minutes, three times a week. Walking to the shops, taking the stairs, or mowing the lawns can count as an aerobic form of exercise.

Other more vigorous examples include walking, swimming, biking, aqua-jogging, aqua-aerobics, cycling, Tai Chi, yoga, dancing, bowls, petanque and golf.

Strengthening

Building strength requires you to tighten your muscles and either hold them in a specific position or move them through a range of motion. To build strength further, weight or resistance can be added, and repetition can be increased.

It is important to work with a trained professional, such as a physiotherapist, when tailoring an exercise programme to suit you.

Some strengthening exercises are included in the exercise section of this guide, starting on page 7.

Stretching and flexibility

A stiff joint or tight muscle can cause pain, discomfort and poor function. Stretching and improving flexibility is important to maintain or improve movement.

Ideally, stretching and flexibility exercises should be done daily. Don't force a stretch. Do the movement until you feel a comfortable stretch, and maintain it for 10-20 seconds.



EXERCISES

The exercises in this guide have been divided into ones you can do while sitting, standing or lying in bed. We hope this makes it easier for you to pick out a few exercises for the areas of your body that are causing you problems, and fit them into your daily routine.

Most exercises in this guide are stretches to help you get the basics right. There are also a few to help you improve strength. If you are unsure which type of exercise is best for you, we recommend you consult your health professional before beginning.

If you experience pain that doesn't go away immediately after finishing any of these exercises, we recommend you get an assessment from a registered health professional, such as a physiotherapist.



Exercises you can do while sitting at the table

Hands and wrists

These exercises help to maintain the range of movement in your fingers, thumbs and wrists so it's easier for you to pick things up.

- 1** Put your palms and forearms flat on the table. Lift your palms and bring the backs of your hands towards yourself, keeping your forearms on the table. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times.



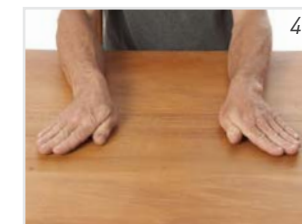
- 2** Keep your palms flat on the table in front of you. Lift your thumbs off the table and put them back down. Repeat this with each finger in turn, keeping them straight. Repeat the whole sequence 3 to 5 times.



- 3** Bend your elbows and place your palms together in a 'pray' position. Slide your elbows slowly outwards, keeping your palms together. Repeat 3 to 5 times.



- 4** Put your forearms and palms on the table in front of you. Try to keep your fingers and thumb close together and bend your wrists sideways in each direction. Repeat 3 to 5 times.



You can do these exercises sitting at a dining room table, perhaps after breakfast so you get your hands moving for the day ahead.

- 5** Open and close your fists, spreading the fingers as wide and straight as possible with the opening of the stretch, and bending the fingers and thumb as much as possible to make a fist. Repeat 3 to 5 times.



- 6** Put your hands in front of you on the table, palms facing each other and thumbs pointing to the ceiling. Bend your fingers to touch your palms. Repeat 3 to 5 times.



- 7** Practise your pincer grip: touch the tip of each finger onto the tip of the thumb in turn. Repeat the whole sequence 3 to 5 times.



Exercises you can do while sitting

Shoulders

- 8** Tuck your elbows in to your waist and put your hands in front of you, palms facing each other and your thumbs pointing towards the ceiling. Bring the palms of your hands towards you, keeping your elbows tucked in. Then move your palms outwards and away from your body, keeping your elbows tucked in. Repeat 3 to 5 times.



Neck

- 9** Sit with a straight back, chest up, squeezing your shoulder blades down. Lengthen the back of your neck and bring your chin towards your neck, to make a 'double chin.' This is just a slight stretch with quite a small movement. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times.



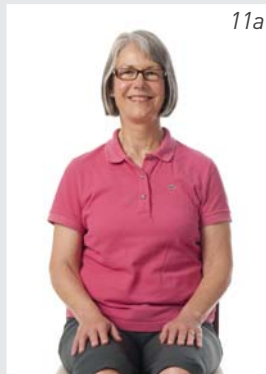
- 10** Lift your chest, brace your shoulder blades downward, tuck your chin in and bring your head forward until you feel a stretch at the back of your neck or your chin touches your chest. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times.



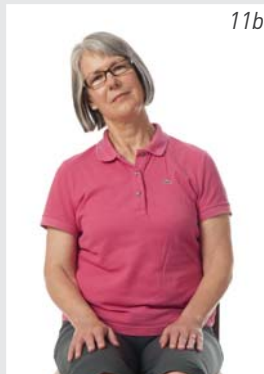
You can do these exercises while sitting in a straight-backed chair, for example a dining room chair.

Upper back

11 Sit up straight. Keep your chin tucked in and take your right ear towards your right shoulder. Feel the stretch on the left side of your neck. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds. Repeat 3 to 5 times on both sides of your body.



11a

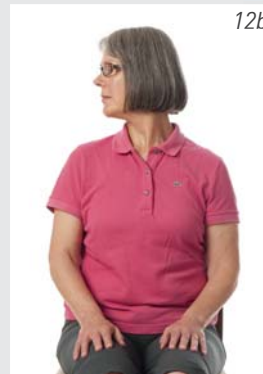


11b

12 Sit up straight. Turn your head to look over your right shoulder, keeping your chin tucked in. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times on both sides of your body.



12a



12b

13 Sit up straight, fold your arms and keep your chin tucked in. Arch your upper back, lifting the front of your chest and keeping your feet on the floor. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times.



13a



13b



- 14** Clasp your hands in front of your body with your arms out straight, widen your shoulder blades, bring your head down, keep your chin tucked in and curl your upper back while reaching forward. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times.

- 15** Reach one arm over the side of your head. Place your other arm down by your side and stretch it towards the floor. You'll feel a stretch on the opposite side of your body. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times on both sides of your body.



- 16** Sit up straight and fold your arms. Rotate your upper back to the right and lift your chest, keeping your chin tucked in. Repeat this exercise 3 to 5 times on both sides of your body.

Knees and thighs

- 17** Sit down and plant your feet firmly on the floor, in line with your knees. Extend one leg in front of you and try to straighten your knee and bring your toes towards you. Repeat 3 to 5 times. If you get a lot of pain with this exercise, stop and ask a physiotherapist for advice.



Lower legs and feet

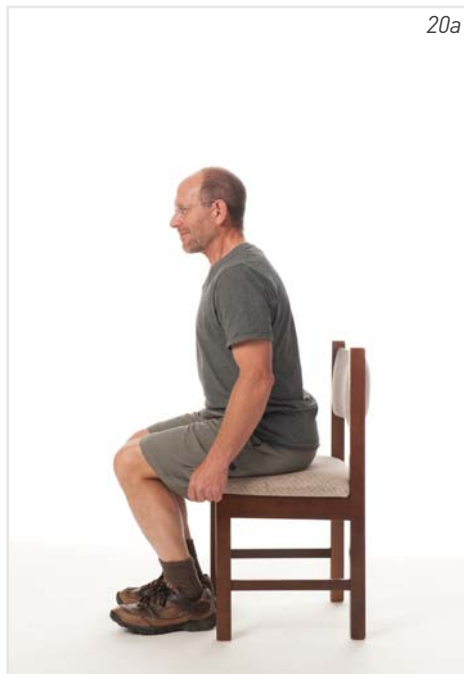
- 18** Sitting down, lift your toes and the fronts of your feet off the floor, keeping your heels on the floor, then touch your toes to the floor and lift your heels up. Repeat 3 to 5 times.



- 19** Cross your leg while sitting, with one foot planted on the floor. Rotate your ankle in a circle. Repeat 3 to 5 times on both sides of your body.



20 Sit towards the front of a chair, bring your feet so they are under your knees and planted firmly on the ground. Keep a straight back and stand up without holding the sides of the chair. This is great for developing leg strength and balance. Repeat 3 to 5 times at first, gradually increasing as you feel able to.



20a

21 Practice picking things up with your toes or scrunching tissues or paper towels under your toes and big toe while sitting. Repeat 3 to 5 times with each foot.



20b



21a



21b



Exercises you can do while standing

Elbows and shoulders

22 Reach forward with your hands and straighten your elbows. Then reach your hands above your head as high as you can. Slowly lower your arms sideways until they're resting against your sides. Repeat 3 to 5 times.

23 Standing with your arms by your sides, turn your hands so that your thumbs are facing forward. Keeping your elbows and arms straight, stretch your arms backwards as far as you can, before returning your arms to your sides. Repeat 3 to 5 times.



22a



22b



22c



22d



23a



23b



24a



24b



25a



25b



26a



26b



26c

Lower Back

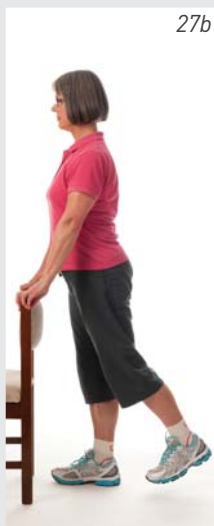
24 Stand up straight. Reach one hand down the side of one thigh and feel a stretch on the opposite side of your body. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times.

25 Place the palms of your hands on the top of the rear of your pelvis and arch your lower back. You'll feel a stretch in your lower back and the front of your hips. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times.

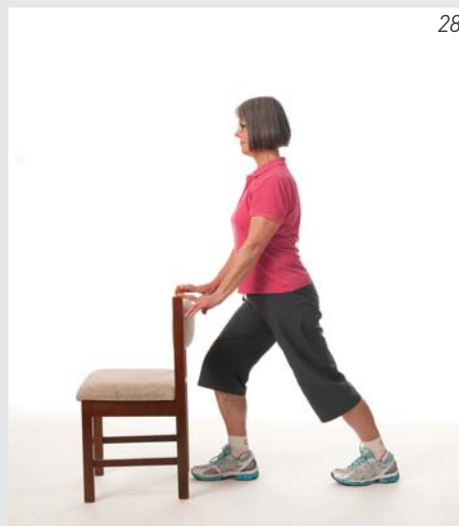
26 Put your hands on the front of your thighs and slowly reach your hands downwards as far as you can comfortably do, flexing your lower back. Curl back up to stand straight again. Repeat 3 to 5 times.



27a



27b



28



29



30a



30b

Knees and thighs

- 27** Standing up, with your hands on a table, sturdy chair or bench for support, lift your right leg out behind you, keeping your knee straight. Try not to lean forward. Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times on both sides of your body.

Lower legs and feet

- 28** Standing up, with your hands on a table, sturdy chair or bench for support, bring one leg forward and take the other back – both feet planted on the floor. Bend the knee of the leg that's in front of you. Keep your back straight, lift your chest and keep both heels on the floor. You should feel a stretch in the upper calf muscle of the leg that's stretched out behind you. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times on both sides of your body.

- 29** Standing up, with your hands on a table, sturdy chair or bench for support, bring one leg forward and take the other back – both feet planted on the floor. Bend **both** knees. Keep your back straight and lift your chest. You should feel a stretch in the lower calf muscle of the leg that's stretched out behind you. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times on both sides of your body.

Leg strengthening:

- 30** Stand up straight, with your hands on a wall or a high bench for support. Keep your chest lifted and tighten your lower abdomen.

Raise your leg out to the side, keeping your body straight and facing forwards. Repeat 3 to 5 times, on both sides of your body, and gradually increase as you feel able.



31

- 31** If you are strong enough, march on the spot without holding on, swinging your arms by your sides. Or you can stand with a sturdy chair at your side, hold on with one hand and bring your knee up towards your body, then the other knee, as if you are marching on the spot. Repeat 3 to 5 times and gradually increase as you feel able.



32a



32b

- 32** Stand up straight, holding onto the edge of a table, sturdy chair or bench for support. Raise your heels off the floor and slowly lower them back down again. Repeat 3 to 5 times and gradually increase as you feel able.



33

- 33** Stand up straight, holding onto the edge of a table, sturdy chair or bench for support. Practice balancing on one leg. Repeat 3 to 5 times and gradually increase as you feel able.

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Exercises you can do while lying on your back

Elbows and shoulders

- 34** Lying on your back, with your arms by your sides, bend your elbows to touch your shoulders with your hands. Keeping your hands on your shoulders, raise your elbows up off the bed, as far as you can. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times.



34a



34b



34c

- 35** Lying on your back, raise your arms up in front of you, clasp your hands together and bring your arms back over your head, as far as you feel is comfortable. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and then return your arms back down to your side. Repeat three to five times.



35a



35b

Lower Back

- 36** Lie on your back with both knees bent. Take a deep breath in, expand your chest and as you breathe out slowly, tighten your lower abdominal muscles. Keep your back in a neutral position: don't flatten your back onto the floor and don't lift it off the floor. Repeat 3 to 5 times and gradually increase as you feel able.

See 36a.



You can do these exercises while lying on your bed if that's where you feel most comfortable.

Hips

- 37** Lying down, bend both your knees up while keeping your feet on the bed. Bend one knee towards your chest, holding it with your hands. Then repeat the same movement with the opposite leg. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times. If you have had a total hip replacement, ask your health professional whether this exercise is suitable for you.

See 37a and 37b.





Physiotherapy New Zealand
PO Box 27 386, Marion Square
Wellington 6141
Level 5, 195-201 Willis St, Te Aro
Wellington 6011
New Zealand
Phone: +64 4 801 6500
Fax: +64 4 801 5571
Email: nzsp@physiotherapy.org.nz
www.physiotherapy.org.nz



PHYSIOTHERAPY NEW ZEALAND
Kōmiri Aotearoa

Arthritis New Zealand
PO Box 10-020, The Terrace
Wellington 6143
Level 2, 166 Featherston Street
Wellington 6011
New Zealand
Freephone: 0800 663 463
Fax: +64 4 472 7066

www.arthritis.org.nz

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