



Around nine million people in the UK have arthritis, which causes pain, swelling and stiffness in joints, muscles, and bones. Treatments and self-help strategies are more effective the earlier they're started. Arthritis can affect people of any age. There's no cure but treatments can manage the pain, swelling and stiffness, and enable those with arthritis to live active lives. More than 200 kinds of arthritis have been identified, including:

- **OSTEOARTHRITIS:** the cartilage between bones wears away and the bones rub together painfully.
- **RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS:** the immune system attacks the joints and causes inflammation.
- **FIBROMYALGIA:** muscles and ligaments all over the body can hurt.
- **GOUT:** sudden pain felt in a joint, usually the big toe.
- **ANKYLOSING SPONDILITIS:** inflammation affects the spine.

The causes of arthritis aren't known. It is thought there may be genetic (inherited) factors that make some people more likely to develop it.

## SYMPTOMS

Arthritis symptoms usually start with pain and stiffness in a joint. This is often in the hips or fingers, but can be in any joint, including the knees, elbows, neck, and toes. The discomfort can cause disrupted sleep. Arthritis can get worse, making it difficult to do everyday activities that involve the affected joints, such as walking, turning handles or taps, or bending down. Some people with arthritis need a carer to help them. Osteoarthritis can cause lumpy bone growths to develop, often on the knuckles of the hands. In both osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, stiffness and pain are worse in the morning but eases during the day

as the joints loosen with use. Pain may increase again in the evening when affected joints become tired from use and bearing weight.

## EXERCISE & ARTHRITIS

A tailored program that includes a balance of three types of exercises:

1. Range-of-motion.
2. Strengthening.
3. Endurance.

This can relieve the symptoms of arthritis and protect joints from further damage.

## EXERCISE ALSO MAY:

- Help maintain normal joint movement.
- Increase muscle flexibility and strength.
- Help maintain weight to reduce pressure on joints.
- Help keep bone and cartilage tissue strong and healthy.
- Improve endurance and cardiovascular fitness.

## RANGE OF MOVEMENT / MOBILITY EXERCISES

To help relieve pain, people with arthritis often keep their affected joints bent, especially those in the knees, hands, and fingers, because it's more comfortable in that position. Although this may temporarily relieve discomfort, holding a joint in the same position for too long can cause permanent loss of mobility and further hinder the ability to perform daily activities.

Range-of-motion exercises (mobility) help maintain normal joint function by increasing and preserving joint mobility and flexibility. In this group of exercises, gently straightening and bending the joints in a controlled manner as far as they comfortably will go can help condition the affected joints. Throughout the course of a range-of-motion exercise program, the joints are stretched progressively farther until normal or near-normal range is achieved and maintained. This helps to maintain comfort while function is preserved.

In addition to preserving joint function, range-of motion exercises are an important form of warm-up and stretching, and should be done prior to performing strengthening or endurance exercises, or engaging in any other physical activity. A fitness specialist can provide you with instructions on how to perform range-of-motion exercises.

# Arthritis

HEALTH  
HUB

## SEE YOUR GP

Most kinds of arthritis are progressive, which means the condition worsens. Early diagnosis is key to fighting it. If you notice pain, especially if it worsens after using the joint, go to your GP. They may diagnose you or refer you to a specialist rheumatology clinic. Your GP or specialist will examine the affected joints, take blood tests, and ask about your medical history and whether there's arthritis in your family. You may also have an X-ray, MRI scan or CT scan. The main thing is exercise. Why not take an easy walk of an evening, swim once a week as it's easier on the joints or spend an hour or so doing some gardening? It's important not to overdo it when you have arthritis. You don't need to walk far or swim for a long length of time, but to do small amounts of exercise regularly will be hugely beneficial.