

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO EXERCISE

Regular physical activity and exercise are important in the management of all forms of inflammatory arthritis (IA), including for rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and axial spondyloarthritis (axial SpA), and offer numerous health benefits. Despite this, people with IA are often inactive, and express many concerns and fears about engaging in physical activity.



It hurts too much to exercise

Movement, physical activity and exercise may help to reduce the amount of pain. Experiencing some pain is usually a normal part of symptom management. A physiotherapist will be able to guide you on how to start moving and exercising in a safe paced way.

Avoiding movement may make symptoms worse. Remember, lack of physical activity is also associated with several other conditions such as heart disease, pulmonary disease, diabetes and obesity, so there is much to gain from getting moving.



Exercise might damage my joints further

Exercise, including weight lifting and high intensity types of exercise, have been shown to be beneficial and safe for people with arthritis.

Although exercise can sometimes cause pain, this is usually a sign of adaptation to a new activity, or if the pain persists that the activity might be too much for your current capacity. It is not a sign that further damage has occurred to the joints.



Exercise might cause a "flare"

There are times when symptoms can increase – joints may swell more, be more painful and may be warm to touch. This is known as a "flare". This may happen if you have overdone things, including over-exercising. It's important that during flares you modify (not stop) your physical activity and allow your body to recover.

A physiotherapist will be able to advise you on how to modify your activity levels during a flare, as well as how to exercise safely to reduce the risk of causing a flare.



Exercise will make me more tired

Pain and exhaustion can make it hard to be physically active, particularly at first when your body isn't used to it. However, exercise and physical activity improve physical fitness and strength, and can also help reduce disease-related exhaustion and boost your mood.

A physiotherapist will be able to advise you on how to start exercising, as well as how to gradually increase it as your body gets stronger.

Physiotherapy is an important part of your overall treatment.

A physiotherapist will guide you on how to exercise safely, increase your activity levels, set goals, and find the right balance between rest and activity.

As part of a healthcare team, physiotherapists will help you resume or maintain an active and independent life, both at home and work.



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