

Design your own exercise program

Regular exercise can help combat the two most common problems for people with arthritis — pain and fatigue.

Although it's good to rest sore, inflamed joints during an arthritis flare-up, most doctors agree that a balance between regular exercise and resting the affected joint is best.

Check with your doctor or physical therapist before you start an exercise program. Here are some tips for exercising (also see our February 1997 Medical Essay):

■ *Ease into it* — Start an exercise program gradually. When you exercise, move with a slow, steady rhythm and don't jerk or bounce. Avoid activities that irritate tender or severely inflamed joints, and stop if you feel new joint pain.

Taking aspirin or another nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) an hour before exercise may limit swelling.

■ *Warm up first* — Warm your muscles with a massage, warm shower or heat packs before exercising (but don't apply heat to an already inflamed joint). Then start each session with gentle stretching.

■ *Aim for 30 minutes a day* — Continuous exercise may give greatest benefit. But you can exercise for several shorter periods, such as 10 minutes, that add up to 30 minutes.

■ *Listen to your body* — New pain that lasts more than 2 hours after you exercise probably means you've overdone it.

of all joints. It
lungs, kidneys

■ *Scleroderma* — Thickens skin. This leads to problems with arms, face or hands. Swelling can occur through skin. Swallowing can be difficult through your esophagus.

■ *Polymyositis* — Causes muscle inflammation and weakness in throat muscles.

■ *Giant cell arteritis*, also called temporal arteritis, is located near your temples. Swelling in the area around the eye can lead to blindness.

■ *Polymyalgia rheumatica* — Causes pain and stiffness in arms, lower back and hips. It's a type of giant cell arteritis.

■ *Ankylosing spondylitis* — This disease is due to inflammation that can attach to your spine. It can lead to Ankylosing spondylitis, which can develop ankylosis.

■ *Gout and pseudogout* — These affect the joints. Gout often affects the big toe, but can affect other joints as well. Pseudogout affects the wrists and knees.

■ *Joint infections* — These can be caused by bacteria getting into a joint. They can be very painful. There is often redness, swelling and pain. Causes include disease, tuberculosis, etc.

How you can help

There is no cure for arthritis, but you can help symptoms. This is important because if you don't avoid persistence, a few less severe cases of gout, may require surgery.

To diagnose arthritis, your doctor will take a history, do a physical examination, blood tests, X-rays, arthroscopy (looking into your joint), bone scans, and genetic testing.

Once you have a diagnosis, there are many ways to live with and manage arthritis.