

Simple Exercises to Help Relieve Osteoarthritis Pain

Exercise Can Reduce Joint Pain

Exercise can help reduce stiffness and pain, and it can also help you lose weight, which takes pressure off aching joints. Losing as few as 11 pounds can cut the risk of developing knee osteoarthritis by 50% for some women. Although OA typically affects the knees, your hips, hands, lower back, and neck may also be affected.

Warming Up Is Critical

Warming up with gentle stretching can help get your body ready for your workout. Gentle stretches such as side bends, shoulder shrugs, arm circles, overhead stretches, and bending to reach (but not touch) your toes are all good warm-up exercises. Do three to five repetitions of each. If you are swimming or walking, you can also warm up with a slower swim or walk.

Joint-Friendly Aerobic Exercises

If you have OA in your knees or hips, you want to avoid any jolting exercise like jogging that causes your feet to pound the ground. Lower-impact aerobic activities such as walking, swimming, bicycling, and water aerobics are easier on your joints. They can also help you slim down. Aim for 30 minutes of low-impact aerobic activity on most days of the week -- work up to that total if you need to start slow.



Tai Chi and Yoga for OA

Tai chi, an ancient Chinese exercise, incorporates slow, gentle movements. It may help with joint pain and flexibility and your balance. Yoga typically involves deep breathing, stretching, and poses that tone, strengthen, and align the body. Both of these low-impact exercises are easy on the joints and can improve flexibility and muscle strength. Look for classes in your community.

Lat Stretch

The latissimus dorsi is the broadest muscle in your back. Stand with your back straight and feet shoulder-width apart. Hold your arms above your head, and hold one hand with the other. Pull upward while leaning straight over toward your right side. Keep your lower body straight. You should feel the pull along your left side. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds, then switch sides. Do this 2 to 4 times on each side.



Tricep Stretch

Your tricep runs along the back of your upper arm. To stretch it, stand with your back straight and your feet shoulder-width apart. To stretch your left tricep, bend your left arm and bring your elbow straight up so that it points to the ceiling. Grab your elbow with your right hand, and pull your elbow toward your head. You should feel the stretch along the back of your bent arm. Hold 15 to 30 seconds, then switch elbows. Repeat 2 to 4 times on each arm.

Calf Stretch

Place your hands on a wall, back of a chair, countertop, or tree. Now step back with your left leg. Keep it straight, and press your left heel into the floor. Push your hips forward and bend your right leg slightly. You should feel the stretch in your left calf. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 2 to 4 times for each leg.

Quadriceps Stretch

You'll feel this stretch in your quad muscles along the front of your thigh. If it causes knee pain, stop. First, balance on your left foot. Bend your right knee, raising your ankle to your hand. Grab hold of your ankle, pulling your foot towards your butt to deepen the stretch. Hold 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 2 to 4 times for each leg. Can't reach your foot? Loop a towel around your ankle to extend your reach.

Groin Stretch

Stretch your groin, or inner thigh muscles, by sitting on the floor with the soles of your feet pressed together. Grab your ankles and gently pull your legs toward you. Go only as far as you can. Use your elbows to press your knees toward the floor. You should feel the stretch in your inner thighs. Hold your groin stretch for 15 to 30 seconds, and repeat it 2 to 4 times.

Hamstring Stretch

Your hamstring muscles run down the back of your thigh. Stretch them by sitting up straight in a chair with one foot on the floor. Slowly raise the other leg, while keeping your knee straight. Support your leg with both of your hands. Hold this for 15 to 30 seconds, and repeat 2 to 4 times on each leg.



Weight Training

Strengthening exercises such as weight training help you build the muscles that support your joints. This can be done using hand weights or even a 1-liter water bottle. Start with weights that you can lift 12 to 15 times without slouching or poor form. Talk to a physical therapist or trainer to help design the best strengthening program for you.

Exercise and OA: Develop Your Plan

Mix up your exercise to keep your joints in tip-top shape and your workout routine fresh and fun. Do low-impact aerobic exercises such as walking. Add in gentle stretches with yoga or tai chi, plus range of motion exercises. Weight training can round out your routine. A well-rounded conditioning program can help improve your ability to move, stay limber, and increase muscle strength.



Listen to Your Body

Listen to your body and know your limits. If you have severe joint pain or stiffness, talk to your doctor about ways to reduce your discomfort. Heat can help relax your joints and muscles. After exercise, try icing your joints for 10 to 15 minutes to reduce swelling.

Source: WebMD.com