



**Wrightington, Wigan and
Leigh Teaching Hospitals**
NHS Foundation Trust

The importance of exercise in inflammatory arthritis

Version number: **1.0**

Last modified date: **03rd July 2026**

The Importance of Exercise

Physical activity and exercise are beneficial for individuals with all forms of arthritis as they can help alleviate some symptoms and improve overall health.

Why Should I Exercise?

There is substantial evidence that exercise can enhance muscle strength, function, and the ability to perform daily activities while reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease. Despite concerns, studies show that exercise does not worsen arthritis symptoms.

Clinical guidelines recommend that people with rheumatoid arthritis should exercise to improve general fitness and be encouraged to complete regular exercise, including exercises for enhancing joint flexibility, muscle strength, and managing other functional problems.

Who Can Help Me Become and Stay More Active?

Healthcare professionals, such as your General Practitioner (GP), specialist nurse practitioner, rheumatologist, physiotherapist, or occupational therapist, can support you in leading a healthier, more active life. It is advisable to consult a healthcare professional before starting specific exercise activities.

How Much and What Types of Exercise Should I Do?

According to the Department of Health, adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity weekly. For those with inflammatory arthritis, pacing exercise into

shorter, repeated sessions may be necessary. Start slowly and expect some muscle soreness as your body adapts.

- **Stretching exercises:** Maintain or increase joint movement by lengthening tissues around the joints.
- **Strengthening exercises:** Increase strength, endurance, and power, often against resistance like gravity or weights.
- **Aerobic exercises:** Improve overall fitness and endurance, including activities like brisk walking or water exercises.
- **Balance exercises:** Enhance postural stability and balance to reduce fall risk.

Will I Harm My Joints by Doing Too Much Exercise?

There is no evidence suggesting that regular, even intensive, exercise harms your joints. Muscle soreness is normal for those new to exercise but will decrease over time.

If you have been active previously, try to maintain your activity levels, though the type of activity may need modification. Learn to interpret your pain and act accordingly.

- Lindsay M. Bearne PhD MSc MCSP, Senior Lecturer, Health and Social Care Research Division, King's College London.
- Sue Gurden MCSP, Clinical Specialist Rheumatology Physiotherapist, Aneurin Bevan Health Board.
- Victoria Manning PhD, MSc BA Hons, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Imperial College London.

This article was downloaded from www.nras.org.uk. National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS) is a registered charity in England and Wales (1134859) and Scotland (SC039721). A private company limited by guarantee. Registered in England and Wales by number 07401141. All rights reserved. © 2023



Version number: **1.0**
Last modified date: **03rd July 2026**

All rights reserved © 2026
WWL Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust