

Water-Based Activity for Arthritis

ARTHRITIS ACTION FACTSHEETS



What Are the Benefits of Water-Based Activity for Arthritis?

Water-based exercises, also known as aquatic therapy or hydrotherapy, can be very beneficial for pain management and overall wellbeing. The buoyancy and resistance of water provide a gentle way to exercise, reducing impact on joints and muscles while still offering cardiovascular and strength benefits.

How Water Exercise Helps

Reduced Impact - The buoyancy of water significantly reduces the load on joints and muscles, making it easier to move without pain.

Pain Relief - The warmth of the water and the gentle resistance can help relax muscles and reduce pain associated with conditions like arthritis, fibromyalgia, and back pain.

Improved Mobility - Water-based exercises can improve range of motion and flexibility, making it easier to move and perform daily activities.

Enhanced Strength - The resistance of the water helps strengthen muscles without the high impact of land-based exercises.

Cardiovascular Benefits - Activities like swimming and water walking provide cardiovascular exercise while being gentle on the joints.

Strengthens and tones muscles – the resistance of the water means that opposing muscle groups are worked in each movement as you push and pull against it.

Hydrostatic pressure improves healing - The hydrostatic pressure when you're immersed in water improves blood flow to your muscles, which in turn creates a better healing environment.

Types of Water Exercises

- **Water Walking** - Walking in waist or chest-high water is a great way to get low-impact exercise while strengthening legs and improving balance.
- **Water Aerobics** - A variety of exercises, including arm and leg movements, can be performed in the water to target different muscle groups.
- **Swimming** - Swimming is a full-body workout that's gentle on the joints and can improve cardiovascular health.
- **Aquatic Therapy**: A form of exercise in warm water that is a popular physiotherapy treatment for people with arthritis and connective tissue diseases.
- **Aqua Cycling**: Using a stationary bike in the water provides a low-impact way to exercise and improve cardiovascular fitness.

Tips for Starting Water Exercise

- If you are worried about exercising in water, talk to your doctor or physiotherapist to make sure water exercise is right for you and to get guidance on appropriate exercises. A class or working one-on-one with a trainer who will ensure a gradual and appropriate pace of exercise might be a good starting point.
- You don't have to be able to swim. You just stay by the side and in shallow water, and you can even have a buoyancy aid if you like. Gradually move to deeper water as you become more comfortable.
- Start slowly - begin with short sessions and gradually increase the duration and intensity as you get stronger. Listen to your body - never push your body through pain during any exercise.
- Use equipment wisely - consider using water shoes, buoyancy belts, and other equipment to enhance safety and comfort. Water shoes will help provide traction on the pool floor and protect your toes from being scratched.
- Although you will not notice it, you still sweat with pool exercises; it is important to drink plenty of water.
- During the winter months - wrap your clothing and towel in a hot water bottle to help you get warm after getting out of the pool.