Instituting an Exercise Plan to Help Manage RA Pain

Kimberly Gottfried

Over 1.5 million people in the US have rheumatoid arthritis. The last thing on many folks’ mind with RA is exercising. However, incorporating exercise into our daily routine is just the ammunition we need in our arsenal to combat RA mobility issues such as painful, swollen joints and constant fatigue. Gentle, regular exercise helps strengthen muscle surrounding affected joints. Exercise also fights fatigue and slows the progression for bone and joint damage. As the saying goes, “You need to expend energy to gain energy.”

No one feels like exercising on days when flare-ups occur. But, being inactive actually leads to worse joint pain and stiffness. Take advantage of those days when you feel less bothered by your RA symptoms and exercise. Before beginning any exercise routine, it is always best to discuss which exercises are best suited for you with your doctor. Low-impact or non-impact exercises like yoga, stretching, and swimming are easiest on your joints. Some of the types of exercise that have proven beneficial to people with RA include:

- Yoga or tai chi
- Swimming
- Water aerobics
- Bicycling
- Walking
- Light Stretching
- Light weight training

See an exercise in the list that appeals to you? Find an exercise buddy to help keep you motivated and make the activity more enjoyable. Even the family dog can getting on the action and keep you company on those walk excursions! Here are a few tips to help you keep on track:

1) **Start slowly.** Start with 5 or 10 minutes daily initially and work yourself up to longer periods gradually.

2) **Make it convenient.** If you have to get up at 5am and drive 30 miles to go to the gym, you probably won’t stick with your program for long. Pick the best time of day when you are not exhausted, and an activity that you have access to easily.

3) **Give yourself options.** Having 2 or 3 different activities or exercises you like to do will keep you from getting bored with your exercise routine and give you alternatives when you need them.

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Once you have established your preferred exercise routine, try to aim for 30 minutes of activity daily at least 5 times per week. Some fitness gurus claim that three 10 minute intervals of training using different techniques over the course of the day, actually builds stronger muscle. Here are the different types of training and examples of each:

* Strength Training – lifting weights
* Flexibility training – yoga or stretching
* Cardio training – swimming or bicycling

Remember:
✓ Check with your physician before beginning any exercise program.
✓ Spend a few minutes warming up before exercise and a few minutes stretching after your workout session.
✓ Take the day off if you don’t feel like exercising on a given day.
✓ Exercise has been proven to help boost your mood, improve joint function, and prevent muscle wasting and weakness.

References:


Recent Findings from the Corrona RA Registry...

Use of healthcare resources and services increases for RA patients who have higher levels of disease activity. Researchers examined RA-related hospitalizations, rheumatologist visits, joint surgeries, lab tests, and imaging for patients who were initiated on biologic medications to reduce disease activity. Patients with higher levels of disease activity had higher rates of use of the various healthcare resources mentioned above. Patients who responded well to their biologic therapy had reduced disease activity and lower rates of the use of these same resources and services. These findings provide additional evidence that better disease management and remission continue to be the targeted goals for treating RA (Boytsov, Harrold, Mason, et al 2016).

Most patients report taking their Methotrexate as prescribed by their rheumatologist. Some factors make it challenging for physicians to accurately assess if a patient adheres to their Methotrexate (MTX) prescription. Simply asking patients about their use of MTX is insufficient given that some patients may be uncomfortable admitting to their doctor that they may have discontinued use or do not take their medication as prescribed. Corrona surveyed patients from within the RA registry and found that most patients took their medication as prescribed, and that rheumatologists’ reporting of use was accurate when compared to patient reporting. However, a small percentage of patients reported not taking MTX or had missed some doses. Physicians should be more aware that simply asking their patients about their use of MTX may not provide enough context about adherence (Curtis, Bharat, Chen, et al 2016).
Take That, Jumping Jacks!
A Guide to Functional Fitness

Rene White

Many people have images of Richard Simmons or Jane Fonda (I’m really aging myself here) running through their heads when they hear the word “exercise.” Throw in some loud pumping music, step class, and questionably fitting leotards, and we have a scene straight from a typical 80’s movie. Aside from some of the pop culture images of exercise, we have also adopted a “no pain no gain attitude” when it comes to fitness and wellness. You don’t need to have a drill sergeant yelling in your ear or feel like you got hit by a Mack Truck the day after to have a truly meaningful workout. There are many activities that can be considered exercise just by virtue of moving in a way that can make everyday tasks strengthen muscles and build flexibility. This is called functional fitness, and you can enjoy these activities without leaving your home or being plagued by the boredom of an exercise machine.

Gardening and yard work engages several muscle groups: your legs for squatting, core muscles to maintain balance, and arms, back, and shoulders for digging and pulling weeds. If you want to take it up a notch, use a push mower or wheelbarrow to provide some resistance training and more intensive cardio work. Take the garden hose and move it from side to side to get a great upper body work. Be sure to switch hands so that both sides are being worked! Throw your iPod on and add some Fred Astaire kicks! Your neighbors will start talking, but your heart will be pumping.

Playing with your kids or grandkids is also a fun form of functional fitness. Running after little ones, pushing them in a stroller, playing Frisbee and even some video games like Wii Fit don’t feel like exercise, but can provide some of the same benefits. There are endless activities that can provide both an overall workout and quality time with the little ones, so throw a dance party, play charades, or even do some good old fashioned hopscotch!

A final example of functional fitness is chair yoga. There are a good number of stretches and poses that can be done right from your desk or seat that will provide increased flexibility and greater range of motion. There are plenty of books and websites which offer step by step instructions for a variety of poses, but we will cover three here. Again, these can be done right at your desk or dining room table and shouldn’t cause coworkers or passersby to give you strange looks!

These are just a few examples of functional fitness that can be easily incorporated into your daily routine. Don’t forget, even everyday chores can serve the same purpose. Been looking at those dust bunnies all week thinking, I’ll get to them? Think of the arm movements we use for dusting, vacuuming, and scrubbing! Put on your favorite music and pump up the tempo to increase your heart rate. Also, light lifting and moving furniture to sweep up that unfinished cookie that slipped behind the couch can provide some resistance training. When lifting, remember to bend your knees. You don’t need to scour now about housework!

Exercise doesn’t have to be boring, cost money, take away from your already busy schedule, or add strain for it to be beneficial. Be creative and have fun! As always, check with your doctor before starting any new exercise regimen.

Get your OM on with these 3 Yoga Poses

Soften tense neck muscles. Grasp onto the seat of your chair and dip your head to one side while applying gentle pressure with opposite hand.

Open tight hips. Cross one ankle over opposite thigh. Hold pose for about 30 seconds. Switch legs.

Free up your shoulders and mid-back. Fold your arm behind your head. Inhale and lift chest. Exhale to press your head into your arm. Repeat with other arm.
Sesame Shrimp Stir Fry with Summer Vegetables and Hemp Seeds
—From Feed Me Phoebe

Hemp seeds are an amazing source of protein, making this dish an excellent vegan entrée if you omit the shrimp. You can also substitute diced chicken breast for the shellfish.

Prep Time 10 minutes
Cook Time 10 minutes
Total Time 20 minutes
Servings 4

Ingredients
• 1/4 cup Liquid Aminos*
• 2 teaspoons sesame oil
• 2 tablespoons raw honey
• 2 tablespoons organic shelled Hemp Seed
• 2 tablespoons organic extra virgin coconut oil divided
• 1 pound large peeled and deveined shrimp, preferably wild
• 1 small yellow onion halved and thinly sliced
• 1 red or orange bell pepper seeded and sliced
• 1 small yellow squash cut into matchsticks
• 3 ounces shiitake mushrooms. Stems removed and thinly sliced
• 2 garlic cloves minced
• 2 cups thinly sliced rainbow chard

Instructions
1. In a small mixing bowl, whisk together the liquid aminos, sesame oil, raw honey, and hemp seeds.
2. Heat 1 tablespoon coconut oil in a wok or large nonstick skillet. Add the shrimp and stir-fry over high heat until pink, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and set aside.
3. Add the remaining oil and stir-fry the onion, peppers, squash and shiitake mushrooms until lightly charred, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, 1 minute. Stir in the chard and cook until wilted, 2 minutes. Add the sauce and simmer until it thickens slightly, 2 minutes. Fold in the shrimp and cook one minute more. Serve over brown rice or quinoa.

Recipe Notes
*If you don’t have liquid aminos on hand, you can substitute soy sauce.