



NEWSLETTER

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Arthritis and Physical Therapy

WHAT IS ARTHRITIS

Arthritis is an illness that can cause pain and swelling in your joints. Joints are places where two bones meet, such as your elbow or knee. Some kinds of arthritis can cause problems in other organs, such as your eyes, or in your chest. It can affect your skin, too.

HOW CAN PHYSICAL THERAPISTS HELP?

Physical therapists can teach you exercises designed to preserve the strength and use of your joints. They can show you the best way to move from one position to another. They can also teach you how to use walking aids such as crutches, a walker, or a cane when needed.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF TREATMENT?

The therapists on your health care team will work closely with your doctor to tailor a program to your specific needs, whether your arthritic problems are widespread or confined to one joint or body area.

The goals of treatment are to:

- ***Prevent loss of use of the joints***
- ***Restore abilities that may have been lost***
- ***Help you adapt to new activity levels***
- ***Maintain your fitness***
- ***Maintain your ability to take part in the activities you choose with minimal help from others***

Therapy should be started early in order to reduce painful symptoms of inflammation, prevent deformity, permanent joint stiffness, and maintain strength in the surrounding muscles.

When pain and swelling are better controlled, treatment plans may include exercises to increase range of motion, and improve muscle strength and endurance.

WHAT ARE SOME BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL THERAPY PROGRAMS?

Physical therapy programs may provide:

- Education about your kind of arthritis, so that you can be a well-informed member of your health care team

- Foot care advice, including information on how to choose well-fitting shoes with shock-absorbing outer soles, and sculptured (orthotic) insoles molded exactly to the contour of each foot.
- Therapeutic methods, including physical techniques and activity modifications, to relieve discomfort and improve performance

JOINT PROTECTION TECHNIQUES

A therapist can show you ways to do everyday tasks without worsening pain or producing joint damage. Some joint protection techniques include:

- Use proper body mechanics to get in and out of a car, chair or tub, as well as for lifting objects.
- Use your strongest joints and muscles to reduce the stress on smaller joints. For example, carry a purse or briefcase with a shoulder strap rather than in your hand.
- Distribute pressure to minimize stress on any one joint. Lift dishes with both palms rather than with your fingers, and carry heavy loads in your arms instead of with your hands.
- If your hands are affected by arthritis, avoid tight gripping, pinching, squeezing, and twisting. Ways to accomplish the same tasks with alternate methods or tools can usually be found.

SUMMARY

As the central member of your treatment team, you are the person responsible for following through with your therapy program. This includes taking medicines as prescribed, continuing daily exercises, having a positive attitude, patience and persistence will help you to get the greatest benefit from your physical therapy activities. You should discuss questions and problems with your doctor and your therapist as they come up so that the program can be adjusted to best meet your needs.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at any time.

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