

# JOINT EXERCISES

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**A**rthritis is the inflammation of the joints. Exercise is recommended because it helps to increase strength, range of movement or flexibility, reduce joint pain and reduce fatigue. It is common for individuals who have stiff and painful joints due to arthritis to avoid exercise, as they are likely to believe that exercise may worsen the pain and stiffness. Contrary to this, the lack of activity of exercise can actually make the joints worse as the lack of exercise weakens the supporting muscles around the joints, thus creating more stress on them. Exercise also helps to maintain a healthy weight thus reducing the load on the joints.

**What is the ideal exercise?** There is no one exercise that fits all. Depending on one's fitness level and existing medical condition, physiotherapists can assess and prescribe individualised exercises. These may include range of motion exercises for the shoulder, wrist, fingers, ankle, and knee. Strengthening exercises are important to build strong muscles that support and protect the joints. Using light

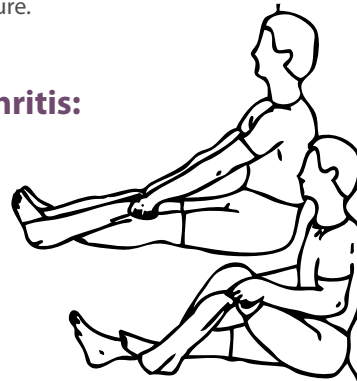
weights such as lightweight balls, water bottles filled with water or elastic bands, you can carry out weight training two or three times a week. Low intensity or low impact aerobic or endurance exercises will improve or maintain your fitness level. Examples include walking, swimming, cycling for at least 20 minutes, splitting the time into five or 10 minute blocks. Balance training is also essential for reducing falls.

If your joints or muscles feel sore before or after exercise, apply heat (such as warm towels or hot packs) for 20 minutes to relax the muscles and joints. Before applying heat, ensure that the joint area is not red or inflamed. If there is an inflammation, apply ice for 15 to 20 minutes.

Listen to your body and start with low intensity exercises if you have not done any exercise for a long time. Consult a professional if you are unsure.

## Try these low intensity exercises if you suffer from arthritis:

With a towel around the heel, gently pull the knee up with the towel.  
Hold for a few seconds then relax the knee.  
*Repeat 2 sets of 10 repetitions*



Attempt to push arms up toward ceiling, keeping elbows straight and back against the floor.  
*Repeat 2 sets of 10 repetitions*



Keeping feet flat on the floor, shoulder width apart, squat as low as it is comfortable.  
Use support as necessary.  
*Repeat 2 sets of 5 repetitions*

