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I Have Arthritis: Is There a Workout for Me?

If you suffer from [arthritis](#), and struggle to find an effective workout that is easy on your joints, a water workout might be the perfect solution.

“When you’re in water you have buoyancy, and because of the buoyancy, gravity doesn’t have the same effect on your joints,” says Karen Sims, an athletic trainer at the [TriHealth Fitness and Health Pavilion](#). “You can do things in the water that aren’t going to hurt your joints.”



Water Properties and Your Arthritis

A water workout can take the pressure off your joints so you can do more physical activity. If you suffer from arthritis, specifically in your knees or hips, walking on a treadmill might be too painful, or nearly impossible.

“In the water, the same person who is unable to walk on a treadmill, might be able to walk for an extended time, and possibly even do some jogging because they have buoyancy and assistance,” Karen notes. “When you’re in a pool, you can jog and do all kinds of things that mimic the exercises you would do on the fitness floor with equipment, while getting the same benefits.”

Effectiveness of Water Workouts

Water is a versatile thing to introduce into your workout to keep it fresh and challenging, while still allowing you to go at your own pace. “Water is a great place to combine cardio and strengthening,” Karen says. “The faster you go through the water, the more resistance you experience — allowing for a total body workout.”

Health Benefits of Water Workouts

For those who suffer from arthritis, the benefits of water workouts go far beyond the physical aspects, including:

- Better sleep
- Decreased fatigue
- Increased endorphin release to help improve mood

“Because there’s a lot of depression for people with chronic conditions, endorphin release is important to help maintain a healthy mood,” Karen explains. “The limitations in daily activities are not present in the pool, allowing them to feel normal, and experience a healthy psychological benefit.”

Could the Right Diet Help Manage Rheumatoid Arthritis Symptoms?

Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic disease in which various joints in the body are inflamed, leading to swelling, pain, stiffness, and possibly loss of function. There is no known cure for the condition, but Greg DeLorenzo MD, a rheumatologist at Group Health, says eating – and avoiding – certain foods may help manage symptoms.



What Foods Should I Be Eating?

“There’s certainly been a lot [of research] in the past few years about the low-inflammatory diet, which is kind of similar to the Mediterranean diet,” Dr. DeLorenzo explains.

The Mediterranean-style diet is based on:

- Plant-based meals, with just small amounts of meat and chicken, when they are used
- More servings of grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, and legumes
- Foods that naturally contain high amounts of fiber
- Plenty of fish and other seafood, rather than red meat
- Olive oil, a healthy, monounsaturated fat, as the main source of fat used to flavor and prepare foods
- Food that is prepared and seasoned simply, without sauces and gravies

Pay Attention to Your Body

In general, Dr. DeLorenzo says to pay attention to how your body reacts when you’re eating certain foods. “Anecdotally, I’ve had patients that’ll eat certain foods and it seems to make their arthritis flare. Obviously, avoid those things,” he adds.

Why Are Younger People Getting Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis, which most people experience with age, is the most common joint disorder, caused by “wear and tear” on the joint. However, this condition is becoming increasingly more prevalent in a younger population.

Factors that can lead to osteoarthritis:

- Family history (osteoarthritis tends to run in families)
- Fractures or other joint injuries can lead to this condition later in life. This includes injuries to the cartilage and ligaments in your joints.
- Jobs that involve kneeling or squatting for more than an hour a day put you at the highest risk. Jobs that involve lifting, climbing stairs, or excessive walking also put you at risk.
- Playing sports that involve direct impact on the joint (such as football), twisting (such as basketball or soccer), or throwing.

Treating Osteoarthritis with Weight Loss

While non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, like ibuprofen (Advil) and naproxen (Aleve) help reduce inflammation and swelling, one of the best things those who suffer with Osteoarthritis can do is lose weight. Focus on low-impact workouts that won’t stress your joints, like aquatic exercises, walking or tai chi.