Arthritis and Physical Activity

The Problem:
In Utah, one-third of adults with arthritis or joint symptoms (34.4%) report limiting their usual activities. More than half of Utahns with arthritis (51.3%) do not get the recommended amount of physical activity. Low levels of physical activity place individuals with arthritis at further risk of inactivity-associated conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, and functional limitations.

Benefits of Physical Activity:
Research has found that regular physical activity is one of the most effective treatments for:

**IMPROVING:**
- Range of Joint Motion
- Muscle strength
- Posture and balance
- Mood and quality of life
- Bone strength
- Energy levels

**DECREASING:**
- Pain
- Muscle tension
- Risk of falling
- Stress
- Body fat
- Fatigue

What Types of Physical Activity Should You Do?
You should choose from activities that improve flexibility, muscle strength and overall fitness. To get the best results, choose activities that you enjoy. Low impact physical activities are usually the most comfortable and include:

- Biking
- Cycling
- Pilates or Yoga
- Swimming
- Tai Chi
- Walking
- Weight training
- Dancing
- Resistance bands
- Water aerobics

How Much Physical Activity do Adults with Arthritis Need?
Adults with arthritis should have a goal to be physically active for two and one half hours per week. You may do 30 minutes of activity continuously or combine 10 to 15 minute sessions. You could also start with shorter sessions, and then build your time and intensity slowly.

How Will You Know if You Have Done Too Much?
It can be hard to predict how your body will react to physical activity. A general guide is the two hour pain rule – if you have pain more than two hours after exercising, you have done too much. When you experience pain stop your activity session. Taking part in physical activities while in pain may lead to injuries or worsening of your arthritis symptoms.

When Should You See Your Health Care Provider?
See a Health Care Provider when:
- pain is sharp, constant and lasts more than two hours after physical activity
- pain is not relieved by rest, medication, or hot/cold packs
- joints swell or feel “hot”

When is the Best Time to Be Active?
If possible you may want to be physically active when you:
- have the least pain,
- are the least stiff and tired, and
- are experiencing the most relief from your medications

Safety Tips
- Talk to a doctor or health professional before starting.
- Be less active when you experience increased pain and stiffness.
- Do not actively move a joint that is red, hot, swollen or painful.
- When you first start, do less than you think you can manage.
- Begin physical activity with gentle movements and stretches.
- Cool down with gentle movements and stretches.

Where Can I Find Information About Physical Activity Classes?

**Arthritis Foundation**
Exercise and Aquatics Program
Phone: (801) 536-0990
Contact: Leslie Nelson
lnelson@arthritis.org

**Utah Arthritis Program**
Phone: (801) 538-9340
Contact: Rebecca Castleton
rcastlet@utah.gov

**EnhanceFitness**
Salt Lake County Healthy Aging
Phone: (801) 468-2804
Contact: Michaelene Waters
Mwaters@slco.org