



Range of Motion Exercises for Arthritis

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How to Improve Range of Motion With Osteoarthritis

If you suffer from osteoarthritis (OA), you probably wake up with stiff joints. You may have even said to your loved ones, “It just takes me a while to get moving.”

People with osteoarthritis typically have reduced range of motion and pain as a direct result from their condition. OA is caused by a reduction of cartilage in a joint, which typically allows the bones to glide over each other easily during movement. When the cartilage is reduced (or not there), this can cause poor movement.

There is no amount of exercise that will replace lost cartilage. However, exercise *can* promote range of motion and overall joint health.

Stretching/Flexibility

Stretching and flexibility exercises are one way to improve range of motion (ROM). ROM decreases for people with osteoarthritis due to pain, which equates to decreased use — it becomes a cycle.

We have learned now that using the affected joints, as opposed to resting them, actually improves the pain and thus the ROM.

The benefit of flexibility training is that it may help the joints heal by allowing the joints to lubricate themselves. They can also be done anywhere, from an exercise mat to a pool.

The type of exercise to be done depends on the affected joint. The hips and knees are two joints that are often affected by osteoarthritis, so we’ll use them as an example:

Knee Exercises

- **Lying leg raise:** lie flat on your back, with arms at your sides. Keep your leg straight and lift it several inches off of the ground; hold for a five-count and lower to the ground slowly. Repeat with the other leg. Do four repetitions with each leg.
- **Lying hamstring stretch:** lie on the floor with both legs bent. Lift one leg, with knee still bent, towards the chest. Place hands behind thigh (not the knee) and straighten the leg towards the head until a stretch is felt. Hold for 30 to 60 seconds; repeat with other leg.
- **Half-squat:** stand up-right, with knees shoulder-distance apart. Stretch your arms in front of you. Bend until you’re in a half-sitting position. Keep your chest upright. Hold the position for five to ten seconds. Do 10 repetitions initially and build up to three sets of 10 repetitions.

Hip Exercises

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- **Inner leg stretch:** sit upright with the soles of the feet touching. Hold your shins or ankle and bend forward at the waist. Press your knees down with your elbows. Hold the position for 20 to 30 seconds.
 - **Double hip rotation:** lie on the floor on your back, knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Keeping your shoulders on the floor, lower the knees to one side while turning your head to the opposite side. Repeat on the opposite side.
 - **Hip and lower back stretch:** lie down on the floor on your back, legs stretched out. Point your chin towards your chest. Bend your knees and place your hands on your knees. Bring your knees towards your shoulders. Taking a deep breath, bring your knees higher as you exhale.

Other Exercises to Include

Low-impact cardiovascular exercise is also important. You could try walking and/or biking, but swimming is a great low-impact exercise that decreases the load on your joints by up to 75 percent.

Yoga can improve flexibility of the joints and may lessen pain. You may find specific yoga for osteoarthritis classes, but regardless there are modifications for most poses so be sure to ask for assistance.

Exercises to Avoid

Because osteoarthritis happens due to a decrease (or lack of) cartilage in a joint, exercises that cause instability of the joints are a no-no. These exercises include, but are not limited to, running, jumping rope and high-impact aerobics, such as Zumba and cardio kickboxing.