

INFORMATION

information



VICTORIA

inc. OSTEOPOROSIS VICTORIA

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY—THE BENEFITS OF STRENGTH TRAINING FOR ARTHRITIS

What is strength training?

Strength training (or resistance training) can be defined as exercise in which resistance is applied to a muscle to develop and maintain muscular strength, muscular endurance and muscle mass.

The resistance applied can take the form of free weights (dumbbells or leg cuffs), machine weights, resistance bands or even body weight.

What are the benefits of strength training for arthritis?

Improvements in muscle strength, disability, function, pain and quality of life can be achieved through strength training and, importantly, such benefits can be obtained without exacerbating joint complaints. In addition, strength training is beneficial for the prevention and management of chronic illnesses such as osteoporosis, diabetes and heart disease.

How to begin

The principles of strength training that apply to the healthy population also apply to people with arthritis, however more consideration needs to be given to safety aspects surrounding any joint damage associated with arthritis.

Therefore, before commencing a strength training program it is strongly recommended that individuals with arthritis or other musculoskeletal conditions see the appropriate health professional (eg. Physiotherapist or exercise physiologist), who

will complete a thorough assessment and design the most appropriate program for the individual. Persons with any form of arthritis or chronic condition should also be “cleared” by their doctor before participating in a strength training program.

This will ensure any complications, medication side effects and any other medical conditions which could be exacerbated by strengthening exercises are ruled out.

What to expect

Strength training programs do not have to be elaborate to be effective. A simple program using free weights (eg. Dumbbells and ankle cuff weights) with one or two exercises addressing each major muscle group is sufficient to provide an overall improvement in strength and function.

Strength training exercises should not cause pain, and any that do should be stopped and reviewed by the health professional who prescribed the program.

To obtain the most benefit from strength training, participants should complete their program two to three times per week and progress the intensity of the exercise under the guidance of their health professional. Generally a strength training program will take between 45 and 60 minutes to complete.

A complete exercise program

Different types of physical activity provide different benefits. In addition to strength training, aim to include some flexibility and

aerobic exercise in your weekly program. These exercises help to maintain joint range and function and promote a healthy heart and lungs. For further information about physical activity for arthritis please refer to Information Sheet 15, Physical Activity and Exercise.

Useful resources

Arthritis Victoria has a register of metropolitan and rural strength training programs conducted by health and fitness professionals who have completed professional development courses run by Arthritis Victoria.

To locate your nearest class contact Arthritis Victoria on (03) 8531 8000 or 1800 011 041 (country callers).

Alternatively, contact your local community health centre or physiotherapist to enquire if they run a strength training program that would be suitable for people with arthritis or musculoskeletal conditions.

Resources available for borrowing by members from the Arthritis Victoria Resource Centre

*All listed books are available on loan from the Arthritis Victoria Resource Centre to members. If you would like to find out more about becoming a member call: (03) 8531 8000.

- Bassey, Joan and Dinan, Susie 2001, *Strength training for beginners*, HarperCollins Publishers, London.
- Nelson, Miriam E et al 2002, *Strong women and men beat arthritis: The scientifically proven program that allows people with arthritis to take charge of their disease*, Lothian, Port Melbourne.
- Sayce, Valerie 1990 *Exercise beats arthritis*, Fraser Publications, Melbourne. [Video recording or DVD]

Walk with ease: Your guide to walking for better health, improved fitness and less pain 2003, Arthritis Foundation of America, Atlanta, GA.

ARTHRITIS VICTORIA

If you would like further information please contact our telephone information service on **(03) 8531 8000** or **1800 011 041** (country callers)



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Prepared by Education & Services staff, Arthritis Victoria, March 2004. This material is for your information and is not intended to be medical advice. You are encouraged to review the information provided with your doctor or relevant health professional.