

OA Today



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Articles contributed by the Healthcare Professionals at the Waterloo Sports Medicine Centre.

Welcome to OA Today!

Fall Fitness Tips

Why wait until January to get in shape? This issue of *OA Today* will provide you with tips and advice on exercise and fitness activities you can pursue in a safe and effective manner.

If you have been diagnosed with early knee arthritis, your doctor and physiotherapist has probably told you to either start or continue a “low impact” exercise program to help strengthen the muscles around the knee joint and improve your overall fitness level. The hard part for most people is to start an activity and then stick to it on a regular basis to achieve the desired fitness and strengthening goals.

What are good “low impact” activities?

From a practical point of view, it can be anything that is not “high impact” –that is, anything that is not a running or jumping activity. Running, jogging, tennis, basketball and other high impact sports can cause too much pounding for an arthritic knee joint and can actually worsen symptoms and accelerate the arthritis and damage over time. Walking, cycling, skating, swimming and aquafit are all low impact activities that are safer for anyone with mild knee arthritis. Swimming and aquafit exercise are actually “non-impact” activities and are recommended for anyone with knee pain bad enough that even walking is painful.

Start a Walking Program

A regular walking program is strongly recommended by doctors and physiotherapists for many reasons. It is affordable and easy to fit into your schedule. It is easy to pace yourself and increase the intensity gradually. You can walk your dog, or with your friends or walk by yourself. Most importantly, it is a “weight-bearing activity” so it also builds denser and stronger bones.

In most parts of Canada, the fall months offer the perfect opportunity to get outside for some fresh air and exercise! The hot humidity of the summer is gone, the weather is cooler, there’s no snow on the ground yet, and hay fever and allergy sufferers are glad when the first frost arrives to kill the ragweed plants.

If you are lucky to live in an area with spectacular fall colours there’s even more encouragement and incentive to go for a long hike in the woods.



Tips to Get You Started on a Good Walking Program

- 1. Get a medical checkup:** Ensure that you obtain clearance from your doctor or health care professional before starting any type of exercise program.
- 2. Get good walking or hiking shoes:** Don't be cheap! If you are serious about pursuing a regular walking or hiking program, visit a reputable sporting goods, hiking or running specialty store and purchase good quality walking running or hiking shoes. Expect to pay between \$120.00 and \$180.00 for good shoes – it's worth it as the shoes will prove to be durable and also help protect your feet.
- 3. Get a Pedometer:** A pedometer is a very simple gadget that you attach to your belt or waist and it counts your steps. A recommended goal is to reach 10,000 steps a day. A pedometer makes it easy to track your progress and motivate you to increase your steps per day gradually and safely!



You can exercise indoors too!

Remember that your low-impact fitness activities do not have to be restricted to walking outside. There are unfortunately several obstacles that people face that restrict their ability to safely exercise outside. This can include inclement weather like rain, snow, or ice. It may be unsafe to walk at night in the dark or there may be too much traffic and/ or lack of sidewalks.

You can walk indoors at the mall, and many recreation facilities have a walking track. In addition you can walk on a treadmill either at home or at a health and fitness club.

What about Yoga?

Yoga has experienced an unprecedented resurgence in North America. Most cities and towns have qualified Yoga instructors that offer classes at a reasonable cost. Even Yoga clothes are fashionable, as popularized by lululemon and other brands!

Most doctors, physiotherapists and other health care practitioners highly recommend yoga as a safe effective activity even for sedentary people not used to exercising. There is in fact good medical evidence that yoga is effective at helping relieve symptoms of arthritis and back pain.

Some people are afraid of yoga worried that they need to be super limber to contort their bodies and limbs into unnatural pretzel shaped positions! In reality most yoga classes, especially the beginner yoga classes are very gentle and relaxing in nature. It is important not to do anything that hurts. Your knee joints specifically may lack full flexibility (especially in full flexion like a deep knee bend) so you are encouraged to modify any yoga movement, posture, or position according to your comfort level and ability. Ask an experienced yoga instructor on what specific classes are safe for you. If you commit to a regular weekly yoga class then slowly over time your body gradually builds strength, balance, and flexibility – which will all help with improving your arthritis symptoms!
