

EXERCISE FOR ARTHRITIS

Specialised Health Programs

By Grandmaster Gary Khor, Founder and President Australian Academy of Tai Chi, author of "Fitness over 40", "Healthy Joints" and numerous other books and videos.

Too many people see arthritis as a "wear and tear" condition of the joints and conclude that the last thing that is needed is exercise. This, however, is not the case and lack of appropriate exercise can not only contribute to the onset of arthritis but can be a major contributor to the problems associated with arthritis.

To understand this we have to understand a little about joints. The cells of the lining of the joint do not have direct contact with the blood circulation system and receive their supply of oxygen and nutrients through the synovial fluid within the joint. If this synovial fluid is not properly circulated (through movement of the joint) then the nutrition of these cells becomes inadequate and they become more vulnerable to disease and injury. Joints thus benefit from a gentle, slow, full rotation of the joint done in a relaxed state of mind. Relaxation is necessary because when we are stressed the body takes away blood from other areas of the body and allocates it to the muscles. If we are relaxed when we exercise the joints supply of nutrients and oxygen is at the highest point while the synovial fluid is being circulated. We also know that rheumatoid arthritis is related to the action of the immune system and that stress has negative effects on that system.

The importance of being relaxed also tells us that exercising during an acute bout of arthritis is not a good idea. The pain involved would leave us far from relaxed better to leave the exercises to periods when inflammation is at its lowest.

Correct posture and movement technique is also important to preventing and alleviating arthritis. Whenever the joints are "locked" or at full extension they are particularly vulnerable to damage. This is particularly the case with the knees and learning to step so that the body weight is absorbed through the muscles rather than the joints is most important.

Finally, breathing is one of the most effective ways of initiating the "relaxation response". When the body is in the relaxation response the resources of the body are directed to the growth and maintenance of the body including the immune system. This is the state the body should be in when there is no external threat. Correct breathing is particularly important when you have conditions such as arthritis.

Exercise is not the whole answer to either the prevention or management of arthritis and you should always take your medical advisors recommendations as to the specific needs of your case. Proper exercise that takes into account the way that the body functions and interacts can however reduce your chances of getting arthritis and improve your quality of life if you already have that condition.

Grandmaster Khor has produced a 75 page booklet "**Healthy Joints**" which is available for purchase for \$15.

The information in this handout is not meant as a substitute for medical advice. If you have any concerns you should refer to your own medical professional.

If you would like to know more then please contact the Australian Academy of Tai Chi for details of books, exercise programs, classes and workshops.

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