

Exercises for arthritis sufferers

By Rosita Evans

Fitness Professional, yoga therapist and author of *Rosie's Armchair Exercises*

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. This is excessive wear and tear on a joint, leading to pain, stiffness and swelling. While there is no actual cure for Osteoarthritis, it can be managed effectively - not only by medication and diet, but also by exercise.

The knees, hips, spine, neck and fingers are most likely to be affected by Osteoarthritis. Because of the pain and stiffness in the affected areas, exercise will be the last thing you will feel like doing! But a little gentle exercise will go a long way to maintaining mobility, which is so important for function.

I have devised a short exercise programme below, which will help to keep the affected joints mobile, easing stiffness and pain. Try this programme 2-3 times a week for maximum benefits.

Before you start:

- If you do not exercise regularly, please check with your GP before following this exercise programme.
- The exercises are not suitable for Rheumatoid Arthritis sufferers.
- The exercises are gentle - but even so, if you feel pain at any time you must stop.
- Be prepared to feel a little aching in the affected joints for the first week or so - this is totally normal, and due to the re-activation of muscles surrounding the joints. It will slowly disappear as the muscles become accustomed to being used.
- Make sure you are warm and dressed in loose, comfortable clothing.
- Use an exercise mat, or a thick bath towel, folded in half length-wise, to lie on.

For the knees

Seated knee bends

Sitting comfortably in an armchair, lift and straighten out one leg in front of you. Slightly bend the knee and then



Seated knee bends

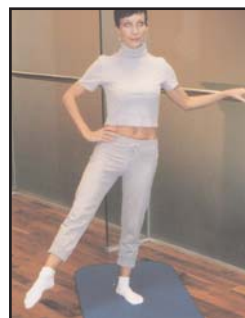
straighten the leg - don't worry if you can't get your leg completely straight, just go as far as you can. This should be done slowly. Continue this tiny bend-straighten movement until you have done 10. Repeat with the other leg.



Mini Squats

Mini Squats

Stand with your feet approximately one metre apart, your toes turned out, and your hands on your hips. Bend your knees and, keeping your knees turned out over your toes, come down as low as you can comfortably manage without leaning forward. From this position, lift up and down a couple of inches, keeping the movement small and slow. Aim for 10 mini squats to start with, slowly increasing at your own pace if you feel able.



Standing hip circles

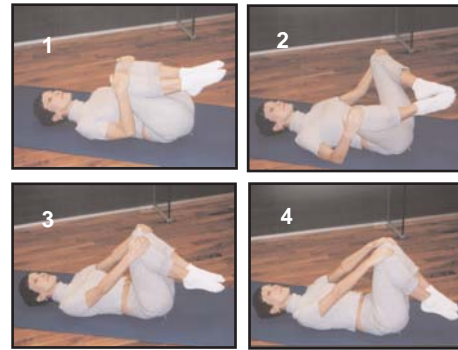
For the hips Standing hip circles

Stand tall and place both hands on the back of a dining chair or armchair. Take your right leg out to the side, and lift your foot a couple of inches off the floor. Keeping

your leg straight, point your toes and start to "draw" a circle with your leg. Aim for 8 circles going in one direction, and then 8 circles going in the other direction. Repeat with the other leg. Now repeat the whole exercise once more.

Supine hip circles

Lie on your back and hug your knees to your chest. With a hand over each knee, start to "draw" circles with your knees - each knee going in the opposite direction to each other. Your feet should remain touching together while you draw your circles and make sure you take your knees as wide as possible out to each side before bringing them back together



Supine Hip Circles

to complete your circle. Aim for 10 circles and then repeat with your knees circling in the other direction.

Supine hip stretch

Lie on your back, with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Bring your arms out to your sides, until they are level with your shoulders, palms facing the floor. Cross your left thigh over your right - make sure your thighs are crossed, and you do not just cross at the ankle. Breathe in, and as you breathe out drop your legs over to your right hand side as far as they will go - you will feel that much of your back, left arm and shoulder will lift off the floor. Relax in this position for approximately 30 seconds, breathing slowly and deeply, and then return to your starting position. Now repeat with your right leg crossed over your left, taking the legs over to your left-hand side.

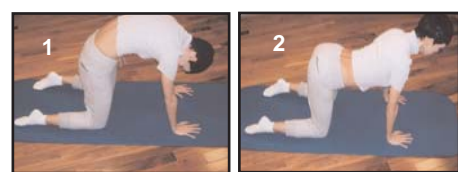


Supine Hip Stretch

For the spine

Cat pose

Come onto hands and knees - make sure your knees are well padded with a cushion or rolled-up towel. Your hands should be placed directly under your shoulders, and your knees directly underneath the hips. Breathe in and as you breathe out, round your spine and lift up towards the ceiling, letting your head drop down and tucking your tail bone



Cat pose

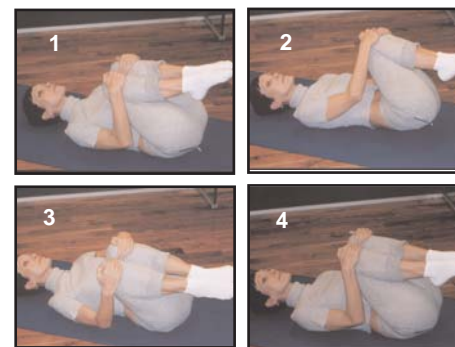
under. Try to keep your abdominal muscles drawn in. You should be aware of the stretch along the length of your spine. Hold this stretch for a slow count of 10, and then start to arch your back down towards the floor, at the same time lifting your tail bone towards the ceiling so that you feel a "dip" in your lower back. Your arms remain straight and your head lifts up only until it is in line with your spine - don't tilt it back. Again hold this for a count of 10 and return to the first position. Continue the two movements until you have done 5 of each.



Supine Spinal Twist

Supine Spinal Twist

Lie on your back, with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Bring your arms out to your sides, until they are level with your shoulders, palms facing the floor. Your feet and knees should be touching together. Breathe in, and as you breathe out take both knees over to your right-hand side, trying to keep the knees on top of each other. When your legs have rested into position, turn your head to face the opposite way. Relax in this position for approximately 30 seconds and then slowly return to your starting position. Repeat to the left-hand side.



Supine Spinal Circles

Supine Spinal Circles

Still lying on your back, hug your knees to your chest. Place your hands over your knees and start to "draw" circles with your knees, keeping the knees as close to your chest as you can (use your arms to help you with this). Your knees remain together, both circling in the same direction. Draw 5 circles in one direction,

and then 5 circles in the other, and repeat this pattern for up to 2 minutes. This movement "massages" your lower back against the floor and can be very useful to ease stiff backs.

For the neck

Standing or sitting, gently drop your chin to your chest until you feel a stretch at the back of your neck. Hold for a count of 5 and then bring your head up. Now drop your right ear to your right shoulder and again hold for a count of 5. Repeat with your left ear. Finish this exercise by repeating the very first stage again.



For the neck

Never, under any circumstances, tilt your head backwards -this can crush the very delicate neck vertebrae.

For fingers

Stage 1

Clench both fists tightly together and then release, stretching your fingers as straight and as wide as you can. Repeat this, quite quickly, for 30 seconds.

Stage 2

Working both hands at the same time, touch each of your fingers in turn to your thumb, starting with the index finger. Start slowly, and gradually pick up speed until you are doing this as fast as you can. Continue for 30 seconds.

Stage 3

Spread your fingers as wide as you can, and then drop your little fingers, then ring, middle and index fingers - in one continual smooth movement, like a "Mexican Wave". Slowly increase the speed of your Mexican Wave and continue for 30 seconds.



Fingers: Stage 1



Fingers: Stage 2

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Rosie's Armchair Exercises

If you like this article and are interested in reading more, you can order your copy of Rosita's book '*Rosie's Armchair Exercises*' from DRWF as featured in the *Diabetes Wellness News*. Please call 02392 637808 or send a cheque made payable to the 'Diabetes Research and Wellness Foundation' for £5.99 (+ inc £1 p&p). Please indicate what the cheque is for when you write!

In her book, Rosita guides you through a complete body workout, all from the comfort of your own armchair! This book is especially useful for the less mobile and includes inflight exercises and tips for long-haul air travel.

MISSION STATEMENT

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