

Lesson 5 - Overcoming exercise barriers

In this lesson, we will address common barriers that may hinder your exercise routine and provide strategies to overcome them. At the end, you will be able to identify and address these obstacles and set realistic goals, helping you maintain a consistent exercise program.

Please read each section of this lesson carefully, and then when you are ready, take the **Lesson 5 Quiz** to test your new knowledge. The quiz is an interactive and printable PDF.



Key points

1. Fatigue and pain are common barriers to exercise for individuals with arthritis. Listen to your body and modify your exercise routine as needed to accommodate your energy levels and pain levels on any given day.
2. Set realistic goals and expectations for your exercise program. Start with small, achievable milestones, and gradually increase the duration and intensity of your workouts.
3. Seek support from friends, family, or support groups who can provide encouragement and motivation. Consider exercising with a friend to make the experience more enjoyable.
4. Other barriers may include lack of time, fear of injury or making disease symptoms worse, socioeconomic status, or lack of professional support.



Dealing with fatigue and pain

Numerous barriers exist for people living with arthritis in relation to physical activity and exercise. Research shows, for example, a lack of tailored advice and easily accessible resources to support rheumatoid arthritis patients during a flare can discourage activity and exercise through fear of injury or aggravating pain or fatigue.¹

It is essential to listen to your body and adjust your exercise program based on your energy levels and pain levels on any given day. Some days you may have more energy and feel less pain, allowing for a more intense workout, while other days you may need to engage in lighter activities or modify your routine to accommodate your symptoms. Remember that even gentle movement can be beneficial, so it's important to find a balance that works for you.



Other barriers to exercising

Emotional barriers to exercising include a fear of not knowing where to start and being judged for your form and technique or how you look. Many forms of arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis, adult Still's disease, and lupus have physical traits like rashes and knobby joints that may make one uncomfortable exercising in public.

Your socioeconomic status may prevent you from participating in certain exercise programs. Certain fitness facilities require membership fees; while public facilities may require a waitlist or registration process and are often based on a first-come-first-serve basis with limited business hours. In addition, many facilities require online or web-based registration, which can be a barrier for people with no ability to get online or who lack digital skills.

Depending on where you live, you may also have limited access to fitness facilities, reliable internet network, and health care professionals who can help you develop an exercise plan. Check your local community or resource centres to see if there are virtual exercise program options that you can participate in from the comforts of your own home. Many online options are also available for exercise classes, which can help provide access if you live in a rural area or have difficulty getting to fitness facilities.



Set realistic and specific goals and expectations for your exercise program

Setting realistic and specific goals and expectations for your exercise program are important for long-term success. Start by setting small, achievable milestones that align with your current abilities and fitness level. For example, you could begin your day with a short walk around the block or gentle mobilization and stretching exercises. As you progress and become more comfortable, gradually increase the duration and intensity of your workouts. This gradual approach helps prevent overexertion and allows your body to adapt to the increased demands of exercise over time. Remember, progress may be slow, but consistency is key.



Did you know?

Recent research shows that even breaking up your sitting time during the day has tremendous health benefits. The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Adults recommend people move more, reduce sedentary time and sleep well. To learn more, see the Guidelines [here](#).



Create a support system

Having a support system can make your exercise journey more enjoyable. Getting support from friends, family, or support groups who understand and empathize with your experience can provide encouragement, motivation, and accountability. Consider finding an exercise buddy who shares similar goals and interests. Exercising with a friend or a group can make the experience more enjoyable and provide additional support for participation. You can motivate each other, share experiences, and celebrate achievements together.

Additional Learning Resources

- Arthritis Consumer Experts Survey Report on Arthritis and Exercise: <https://bit.ly/ACESurveyExerciseJHIEN>
- Johns Hopkins Arthritis Center: Strategies to Increase your Level of Physical Activity: <https://bit.ly/StrategiestoincreasePA>
- HealthLink BC resources: <https://bit.ly/HealthLinkBCResources>
- CDC resources: <https://bit.ly/CDCResourcesOvercomingBarriers>
- NIH Overcome Exercise Barriers: <https://bit.ly/NIHNoMoreExcuses>

References

1. Patient experiences of physical activity and exercise in rheumatoid arthritis. 2023. Rheumatology Advances in Practice. <https://academic.oup.com/rheumap/article/7/1/rkac098/6997889>