Psoriatic arthritis and physical activity

Living with psoriatic arthritis can be challenging, but physical activity can help you take control of your life. Physical activity is important for your overall health, and it can improve your quality of life with psoriatic arthritis. Other benefits include:

- Improved flexibility in joints and tendons
- Reduced inflammation and pain
- Increased muscle and decreased workload on joints
- Weight loss
- Decreased risk for related health conditions (known as comorbidities)

A closer look at comorbidities

People with psoriatic arthritis can develop stiff joints and muscle weakness. But you can also be at a higher risk for developing comorbidities -- health conditions that are related to psoriatic arthritis. By making healthy lifestyle changes, you can reduce your risk for these related health conditions:

- Cardiovascular (heart) disease
- Depression
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Crohn’s disease
  (a type of inflammatory bowel disease)
- High cholesterol
- Obesity
- Osteoporosis

How to get started

It can be difficult to begin a new physical activity plan. Start with small amounts of time, for example, five to 10 minutes each day for a few days each week. You should also start with low-intensity exercises, such as a slow walking or cycling pace.

Once you’ve been following this plan for a few days or weeks and you’re comfortable, slowly increase your time. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recommends 2.5 hours of moderate physical activity each week. You can start with five to 10 minutes a day and slowly add time until you’ve reached 30 minutes a day. Thirty minutes of physical activity daily, five times a week, meets the HHS recommendation. Remember that you can also split up the time by doing 10 minutes of activity at three different times in your day.

Slowly increase your intensity to a moderate level. Moderate physical activity can be measured by how hard you breathe and how fast your heart beats. An example of moderate level walking is a brisk pace. When you are walking briskly, you can start to feel your heart beating faster. If you are having a conversation while walking briskly, you can feel a shortness of breath.

You can see benefits from activities as simple as walking or stretching. Starting small is the best place to start, and starting today is the best time to start.
The following activities are generally safe for people with psoriatic arthritis:

- **Walking** helps you build strength and keep flexibility in your joints. You can try walking for small amounts of time, for example, 10 minutes. Slowly build up to half an hour. Starting small makes it easier to start a new habit. But also by slowly building up the time that you walk, you will be able to prevent any injuries.

- **Cycling** is also a good option because it is not as hard on the joints or body as other types of physical activity.

- **Yoga or tai chi** are both activities that help relieve pain, relax muscles and improve your range of motion.

- **Swimming or water activities** are also helpful in relieving pain in joints and sore muscles while building strength. These activities are good options for people with PsA because they are easy on the joints and body.

### Tips to becoming active and staying healthy

- **Drink enough water.** Your body needs water. By keeping your body hydrated, your heart won’t have to work as hard to pump blood through your body and to your muscles. Try to drink water throughout your day. When doing physical activity, be sure to drink water during and after your exercises.

- **Stretch.** Stretching helps your joints and muscles to become more flexible and stay flexible. This will reduce your psoriatic arthritis symptoms and your risks of injuries.

- **Change it up.** Having different activities helps to keep you from getting bored. Try finding activities that you can do indoors and outdoors. This will ensure that you’ll have different options on those days that are sunny and those when you’re not able to go outside. You should also invite a friend or family member to join you with your physical activity to keep it fun and to motivate each other.

- **Listen to your body.** It is important to pay attention to signs from your body and your PsA symptoms. You might feel sore after your physical activity. This is normal. If your soreness, stiffness or joint pain continues or worsens the next day, this is your body telling you that the level of intensity was too much. You should allow your body to rest and recover.

Before you start any physical activity, you should speak with your health care provider, a physical or occupational therapist, or a qualified fitness or health professional to help you create a physical activity plan that works best for you. Be sure to talk about any concerns that you might have to reduce your risk for injury.

### For more information

- National Psoriasis Foundation: [www.psoriasis.org](http://www.psoriasis.org)

- American Heart Association: [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)

- To find a physical therapist, ask your health care provider for a referral or visit the American Physical Therapy Association at [www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org).