Move to Improve

Definition of terms used to rate the benefits of different elements of exercise

Being physically active is good for general health and can have specific benefits for people with rheumatic or musculoskeletal disease (RMDs), such as helping to keep joints mobile. The most appropriate form of activity will depend on a number of factors including the type of RMD you have, which joints are affected and the level of joint damage etc. This is why it is important to consult your doctor or physiotherapist about the type of exercise you need therapeutically, as well as the type of activities you enjoy doing to keep you healthy.

The term **physical activity** is used to describe any form of daily activity that involves movement, rather than sitting or lying still. This could include playing with children, doing housework, walking the dog, gardening etc. Being physically active can have many benefits for people with RMDs including releasing stiffness and lifting your mood.

The term **exercise** is used to describe planned, structured and repetitive movements that are performed *frequently*, at a given *intensity* and for a set duration of *time*. Exercise can be therapeutic, such as in rehabilitation, or taken as an enjoyable way of improving or maintaining:

- muscular strength and endurance
- flexibility and joint mobility
- motor functions including coordination and balance
- aerobic capacity and increased energy expenditure, which can help with weight control
- bone mineralisation contributing to the prevention of osteoporosis
- mood and self-esteem leading to increased positivity

Level of exercise

What will be a hard or difficult form of exercise for one person may be much easier for someone else. For example, walking, cycling or swimming at a gentle pace (*low intensity*), might have an *aerobic effect* (increase your heart rate and breathing) for some people, whilst others would need to exercise at a moderate to high intensity to experience the same effect. This will depend on a number of factors such as your age, your general state of health, disease progression and how regularly you have been exercising. Choose a level of exercise that works for you.

Starting out

Always begin gently and build up slowly over time. It is better to do little and often than to try and overdo things and to push yourself too hard when you start exercising.

If you do need to stop exercising for any reason, always start again gently and build up slowly. When you reach your required level of function, you will need to keep up regular activities to maintain this level.

How much exercise

When you repeat activities *regularly* your body will adapt over time and you will find you can do more with less effort. Regular exercise can also help slow, or prevent loss of function due to disease progression.

Ideally, you should try and do some stretching/flexibility exercises every day, muscle strengthening and endurance exercises two to three times a week and some form of aerobic exercise for 20 minutes three times a week. Luckily, different types of exercise can be combined in one programme!

The key is to find things you enjoy doing so that being active is something you look forward to and becomes part of your daily life.

Did you know?

The word '**fit**' comes from:

Frequency – how regularly you exercise

Intensity – how hard you exercise

Time – how long you exercise

Now the word **fitness** is used to describe health and the ability to meet the demands of a physical task.

Common terms used when describing different types of exercise

Aerobic / cardiovascular	-	Exercise that raises the heart rate and breathing, e.g. walking, cycling, swimming, dancing etc. at a moderate or high intensity
Balance	-	The ability to control the body's position when either stationary or moving
Endurance	-	How long you are able to exercise at low, medium or high intensity
Flexibility	-	The ability of muscles to stretch. Stretching muscles helps to keep them supple and relieves stiffness
High impact	-	Exercises where the body weight impacts forcefully against a surface, for example running or jumping
Low impact	-	Exercises where there is minimal impact through the joints and pelvic floor or where the body is supported whilst exercising, e.g riding a bicycle or swimming

Mobility	-	The ability of joints to move through a range of motion
Posture	-	Good body alignment
Strength	-	The extent to which muscles can exert force by contracting against resistance (e.g. free or fixed weights, bands, moving in water etc)
Weight bearing joints	-	Joints that support the weight of your body against gravity when you are upright, i.e. your spine, hips, knees, feet and ankles
Weight bearing exercises	-	Exercises where your body is working or moving against gravity, for example walking *(swimming is non-weight bearing because the water supports your body weight)* Weight bearing exercises also help maintain bone density and reduce the risk of osteoporosis