

Exercising with Pain

Pain. It's your body's way of warning you that something might be wrong. But that doesn't necessarily mean you should avoid exercise. In fact, depending on the type of pain you have, exercise could actually help.

There are two kinds of pain—acute (temporary) and chronic (ongoing).

Acute pain begins suddenly, lasts for a short time, and goes away as your body heals. There are many causes for acute pain. With exercise, sometimes acute pain can be caused by overdoing it, like lifting something that's too heavy or using the treadmill at a speed too fast for you to handle at your current fitness level. Practicing exercise safety is the best way you can prevent over-exercising. Set realistic goals and pace yourself. Begin your program slowly with low-intensity exercises and work up from there.

Acute pain can also follow an injury, like a strain, sprain, or break from a fall. Balance exercises can help prevent falls that lead to these kinds of injuries.

Exercising with acute pain

If you experience a sharp pain in your muscles and/or joints, stop exercising and see your doctor. He or she will be able to say whether it's safe to exercise while experiencing acute pain and what activities might help. There may be simple stretching or strength training exercises, for instance, that you can do with a physical therapist or trainer to help with recovery. Your doctor might recommend that you reduce the intensity of your activity so you do not make the health issue worse, prolong the symptoms, or cause re-injury.

Warm up before exercising to get your body moving and ready for activity and to help reduce your risk of injury. For instance, you might do a few minutes of easy walking. Also, cool down after your workout to help slow your heart rate and breathing back to normal as well as relax the muscles you just used. If you did endurance exercise, you might begin your cool down by slowing your intensity and then trying some light stretching.

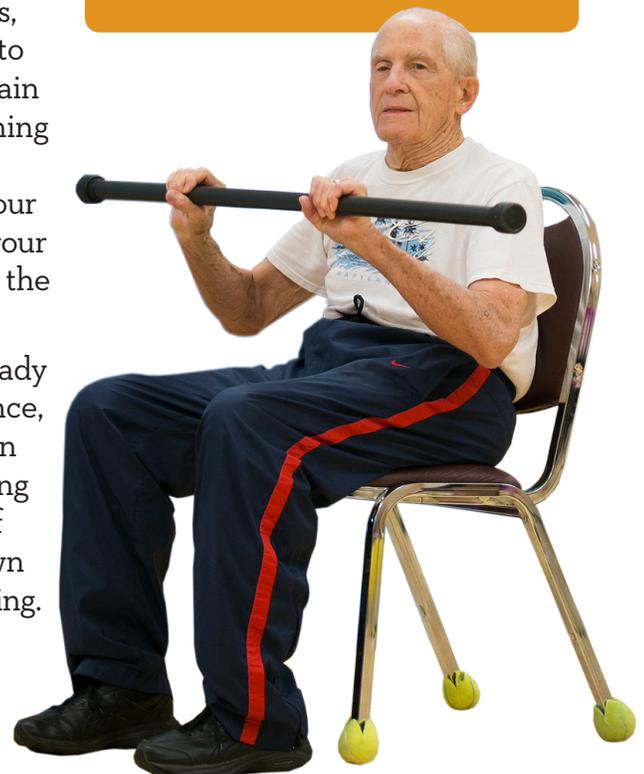
Quick Tip

Pain rarely goes away overnight. Talk with your doctor about how long it may take before you feel better. As your pain lessens, you can likely become even more active.

VISIT

www.nia.nih.gov/Go4Life

- See sample *Go4Life* exercises.
- Read safety information.
- Print and share tip sheets.
- Sign up for virtual coach messages.



Exercising with Pain (continued)

Chronic pain is ongoing and often a symptom of a larger health problem like arthritis, cancer, diabetes, or shingles.

Most people living with chronic pain can exercise safely, and it can assist with pain management. In fact, being inactive can sometimes lead to a cycle of more pain and loss of function.

Exercising with chronic pain

Talk to your doctor about what exercises/activities might be right for you. Each type of exercise has its own benefits, so a combination could be best.

Here are some ways exercise can help:

- **Strength exercises** can help maintain or add to your muscle strength. Strong muscles support and protect joints. Weight-bearing exercises include using resistance bands or weighted wristbands.
- **Endurance exercises** make the heart and arteries healthier and may lessen swelling in some joints. Low-impact endurance exercises include swimming and bicycling.
- **Flexibility exercises** help to keep joints moving, relieve stiffness, and allow for more freedom of movement for everyday activities. Flexibility exercises include upper- and lower-body stretching, yoga, and tai chi.

Exercise can also help you maintain a healthy body weight, which may relieve knee or hip pain from osteoarthritis, for example. Putting on extra pounds can slow healing and make some pain worse.

Remember to listen to your body when exercising and participating in physical activities. Avoid over-exercising on “good days.” If you have pain, swelling, or inflammation in a specific joint area, you may need to focus on another area for a day or two. If something doesn’t feel right or hurts, seek medical advice right away.

Preventing Lower Back Pain

Exercise is an effective way to lower your risk for some pain. For example, research has shown that exercise combined with education can reduce risk of lower back pain. The study looked at exercises like strength training activities targeting the back and abdominal muscles, stretching and spine range of motion exercises, and aerobic conditioning.

