

Orthopaedic Connection

Arthritis and Exercise Machines

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

I get a lot of questions in the office about whether exercise machines can be used by patients with arthritis. Since I also see a great number of patients with arthritis there is a need to clarify this situation.

Patients with arthritis need regular physical activity perhaps even more than those who do not have arthritis. I want my patients with arthritis to remain active and maintain strength and flexibility. It is their only hope. Regular physical activity allows patients to lead their lives in the fullest and best way they can.

But it can't happen unless the person with arthritis makes the time commitment and has the right exercise equipment at home or nearby.

When used properly exercise equipment can improve endurance, strength and range of movement of joints and at the same time decrease the pain and fatigue of arthritis.

I always want to work with the family doctor to decide what program might work best for our mutual patient. Someone who is older shouldn't start an exercise program with equipment without clearing it with their family doctor first.

Aerobic Exercise

Activity that moves the large muscles of the lower body for a sustained period makes the heart beat more rapidly. I want my older patients with arthritis to do this **as their condition allows**. That's why I need the family doctor to be involved.

Equipment that works best for this avoids compression and shear forces on the joints.

Choices

A recumbent bike with a seat that lets you sit back rather than upright is what you need. If you have lower body arthritis, a recumbent bike is best to increase cardiovascular endurance as well as leg strength and flexibility.

The elliptical trainer is the next best choice. It is a stationary machine that has pedals and hand rails and simulates a walking motion. It is safe because it has a low compression force on the joints.

What about a treadmill?

It is another option for a walking program. I tell my arthritis patients not to use the incline component because it increases compression on their joints and probably will increase their pain.

Discount stores usually have affordable versions of these machines. The base support should be wide and at least two times your body weight. Ask questions.

What about a stair climber?

Ugh! No. These machines produce high compression and shear force loads on your arthritic joints and can do more harm than good to your joints. If you do not have arthritis, a stair climber may be fine to use. I have nothing against them except in people with arthritis.

Class, we have just gotten started. Can I please ask you all to come back next week to learn more about arthritis and exercise. See you later.

Join us 24 hours per day at www.orthopodsurgeon.com for more cool information about everything bone and joint. The office website also takes you to Your Orthopaedic Connection that has a ton of information.

Our goal is simple - to help people return to more pain free, functional lives.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush