

Exercise – It's Good For Your Joints

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There are many benefits to exercise including a positive effect on blood pressure, cholesterol level, strength and functionality levels, cardiovascular endurance, balance, and bone growth and health. Exercise also produces an overall feeling of well-being.

There's another great benefit to add to the list – joint health. Exercise can maintain the range of available motion, provide regular nutrients to the joint capsule (fibrous tissue surrounding the joint) and structures, and the muscular support to minimize the wear and tear as a result of use and aging.

Generally, your body responds to stresses placed on it during your day-to-day activities, and this is especially true of your joints. Range of motion is best maintained when the joint is fully extended and exercised as part of a daily routine. Otherwise, the joint capsule loses its mobility, while the ligaments and tendons that surround the joint shorten. This results in a shorter arc of active motion, and a feeling that tells us, "I can't bend over or reach up like I used to."

In addition, nutrients, which keep joint tissue healthy, are provided through fluid in the joint (synovial fluid). This fluid is like the oil in your car – necessary to protect against wear and tear. It is beneficial to have this fluid reach as much of the joint surfaces as possible to maintain their health.

While regular stretching exercise is a generally accepted practice to maintain joint mobility, strengthening muscles that surround a joint increase stability, and thus minimize the stress to the joint. This theory is also behind many physical therapy programs for patients who experience joint pain from arthritis or traumatic/overuse joint injuries. Exercise is very effective in minimizing pain and returning the joint...and the patient...to normal.

Often, the physical therapist analyzes movement patterns to determine any overuse or imbalance in muscle groups that might lead to joint pain, and then prescribes exercises to correct the imbalance. Injuries to the shoulder, hip, knee and ankle all respond well to exercise, given their use in daily activities, such as, pushing/pulling, lifting/carrying, reaching (shoulder), walking, climbing stairs, squatting, stooping, running, and lowering yourself to sit (lower extremity joints). Many times, just correcting a muscle imbalance, creating strength and endurance of the major muscle groups surrounding the joint, or correcting the biomechanics of the joint relieves pain or improves performance.

A word of caution, though – not every exercise is suitable for everyone. Sometimes, with advanced arthritis or "hyper" mobility (loose joints that may be prone to dislocation), specific exercises that stress the joint motion should be avoided. It is always best to check with your physician, and obtain guidance from your physical or occupational therapist.

Eisenhower Rehabilitation Services Exceptional facilities (including the desert's largest indoor pool) are combined with state-of-the-art technologies and the incomparable resources of Eisenhower Medical Center – your health care provider of choice. The Eisenhower Rehabilitation Services team of professionals – the largest of its kind in the Coachella Valley – specializes in hand therapy, neurological disorders, balance and vestibular rehabilitation, orthopedics, lymphedema management, wound care, pediatrics, sports medicine, and industrial rehabilitation. Ask your physician for a therapy referral, and then call Eisenhower Rehabilitation Services, at 760-773-1630.