

# The importance of staying active and flexible

## What is arthritis and what can you do to keep your joints supple and moving?

What does the term arthritis mean? Occasionally we see people who are worried they may have a disease that is going to affect all their joints and leave them unable to move about freely. In the vast majority of cases this is not going to happen. There are three uses of the term 'arthritis': the first is *rheumatoid arthritis* which is a nasty disease affecting the joints and causing severe pain, swelling and destruction of the joint; the second is *osteo-arthritis* which is a less aggressive type of joint pain and swelling, which is inherited and is often characterised by swelling in the joints at the ends of the fingers; and the third is by far the most common: *wear and tear arthritis* which simply means that the joint surface is becoming worn - with the passing of time.

### Sweep and Squeeze

The way our joints work is really rather fascinating. If you imagine a simple ball and socket joint like the hip, the surfaces are covered with cartilage to allow smooth, gliding movement. We don't feel our joints move – usually! This friction-free movement is like ice moving on ice, it's so smooth you don't even notice it happening. When that movement occurs, the lubricant inside the joint is swept all over the cartilage surfaces.

A little pressure through the joint surface, such as occurs in weight-bearing exercise, also stimulates the cartilage, and together this 'sweep and squeeze' is what keeps the joint surface healthy.

### Use it or lose it

This mechanism for keeping our joints



healthy is ideally suited to living on the planet but only as long as we keep active! Joints like to be taken through their full range of motion so that all the cartilage surface is used and

of course when this happens the cartilage stays healthy and smooth. This is one of the reasons why people who do yoga over many years are often in such good shape, they thoroughly exercise their joints and keep the joint surfaces in optimum health.

### Using your joints

Office workers risk losing their full joint mobility simply because on a day to day basis there is very little full range joint motion taking place. Without full range of motion, the cartilage gets ragged and wears unevenly.

You may not feel it, it won't hurt, but your joints get a little bit stiff day by day. The soft tissues surrounding the joints, like ligaments, tendons and muscles, don't get stretched so they get a bit tight and before you know it, you're getting up from your desk at the end of a long and busy day, thinking 'Wow, my knees are feeling really stiff and I haven't even been doing anything!'

***Stay active and flexible in 2009 to help keep your joints in tip top condition!***



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