

>>> no  
more







# excuses!

What's preventing you from exercising? Our experts explain how to overcome nine common hurdles – from pain or exhaustion to boredom. BY SHARON LIAO

**Y**ou've heard it before: Exercise is vital for people with arthritis. It can increase flexibility, reduce pain and ease joint stiffness – not to mention trimming your weight and boosting your strength. Yet only 13 percent of men and 8 percent of women with osteoarthritis (OA) get the recommended 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity a week, according to a study published in 2011 in the journal *Arthritis & Rheumatism*. To help you overcome nine common excuses for skipping exercise, we consulted experts and sifted through research. Once you're armed with their smart strategies, you'll be able to sidestep any fitness hurdle. Of course, always consult your doctor before you begin an exercise regimen.

## excuse #1

### "I have no time to work out."

You barely have time for work, family and household responsibilities, much less a trip to the gym. "But you don't have to set aside hours for exercise every day," says Tony Wanich, MD, a sports medicine specialist and orthopaedic surgeon at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, N.Y.

According to a study published in a 2007 issue of *Arthritis Research & Therapy*, women who exercised just 75 minutes a



week – that’s about 11 minutes a day – were less likely to experience stiff, achy joints than their sedentary counterparts. “Do a few laps around the shopping center while you’re running errands or go for a quick stroll at lunchtime,” suggests Dr. Wanich. “It all adds up.”

## **excuse** | “I’m in too much pain.”

**#2** When you’re already hurting, it’s difficult to find the motivation to move. But mild activity can help ease the ache, says Megan Murphy, a physical therapist in Denver. Before you try to exercise, first tune into your body. “Take stock of your pain on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most pain,” she says. If your baseline is generally a 3, for instance, avoid or stop exercising if that number inches up.

“It’s also smart to begin with a low-impact activity, like biking,” says Dr. Wanich. “Swimming or walking in the pool is also an option, since the buoyancy of the water takes pressure off of your joints.” But before you dive in, start with a warm up to prep the muscles. “You may literally want to use a heating pad to loosen up your muscles and ease the stiffness,” he says. “Then follow that with 10 minutes of basic stretching or light activity before your workout.”

## **excuse** | “Working out is boring.”

**#3** “The key to sticking with an exercise program is finding something that you enjoy,” says Walter Thompson, PhD, a professor of kinesiology and health at Georgia State University.

To make things even more fun, ask a friend, spouse or coworker to join you. “Exercising with a buddy makes it a social activity,” says Mary Edwards, fitness director of Cooper Fitness Center in Dallas. “Plus, there’s another person to keep you accountable, so you’re less likely to skip a session.” In a study published in a 2005 *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, people with knee OA who were paired with a partner adhered to a workout plan for longer than those who did it alone. If your pals aren’t interested, check out walking groups and clubs in your area, as well as community sites like meetup.com or the Arthritis Foundation Walk With Ease Program.

## **excuse** | “I’m too exhausted.”

**#4** Although it sounds counterintuitive, exercise can actually put more fuel in your tank. According to a 2008 study published in the journal *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, inactive adults who started riding a stationary bike for 25 minutes three days a week experienced a 20 percent jump in their energy level after about two months. “Physical activity increases circulation throughout the body,” explains Lillie Rosenthal, DO, a board-certified physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist in New York City. “It also triggers



the release of feel-good hormones like endorphins, which can make you feel more alert and invigorated.”

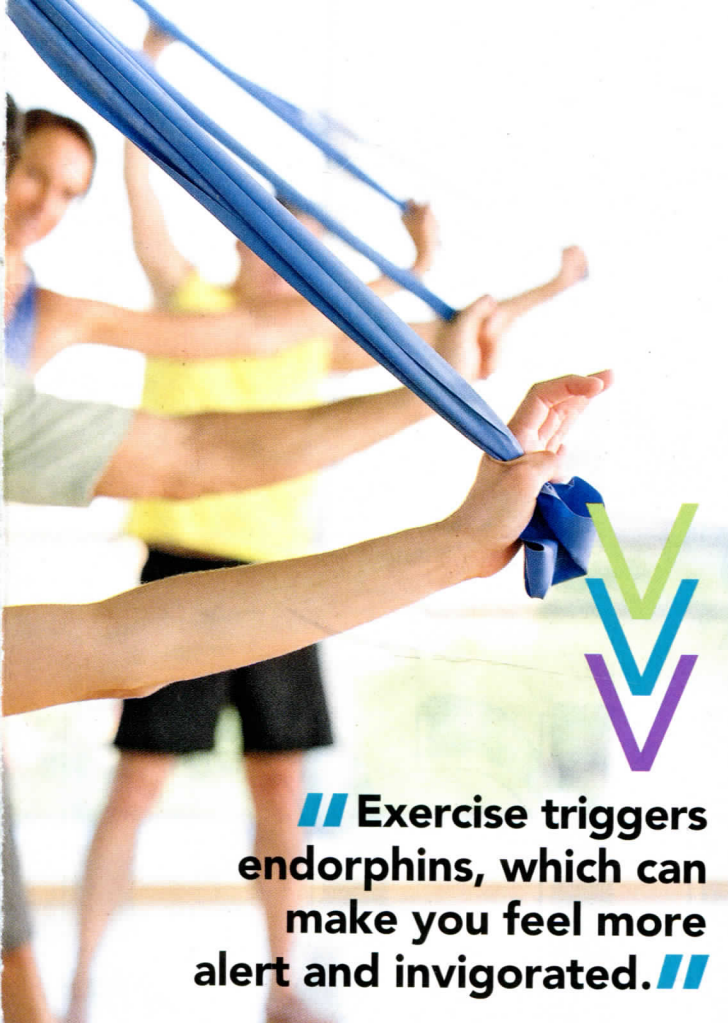
Even with this knowledge, it’s easy to shrug off workouts. If you’re usually beat at the end of the day, switch to morning or lunchtime sessions. “To make things even easier, prepare in advance,” says Dr. Rosenthal. “Lay out your clothes and sneakers the evening before.” Or pack your lunch so you won’t have to rush to grab a meal after your workout.

## **excuse** | “My weight is fine. I’m not trying to slim down.”

**#5** There’s more to exercise than losing weight. In addition to fending off disease – including those that commonly occur with arthritis, such as diabetes and heart disease – studies show even a little exercise boosts mood and reduces stress.

And regular movement helps ease daily tasks. “Exercise strengthens the muscles and ligaments around the joint, so there’s less pressure,” says Lauren Smith, a physical therapist with the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City. This translates into better range of motion and less achiness, making it easier to climb stairs, get dressed and take out the trash. In fact, research published in 2001 in the *Journal of Rheumatology* found that people with knee OA who





**// Exercise triggers endorphins, which can make you feel more alert and invigorated. //**

participated in a strength-training program for four months experienced a 43 percent decrease in pain.

**excuse #6** | **"I'm too self-conscious."**

Many people join gyms as part of their New Year's resolution to get fit – only to find they are too embarrassed by their physique or ability to work out there. "You shouldn't feel out-of-place at your gym," says Edwards. She suggests touring the health club at the times you usually work out and looking for classes suited to your interests and fitness level.

If you're still hesitant about the gym, check out fitness classes available at your local community or religious center, or begin walking, biking or swimming on your own or with a friend, with your doctor's approval. Whatever you decide on, just get started. "Remember that the path of fitness is a journey," she says. "You have to crawl before you walk or run."

**excuse #6** | **"I'm not seeing results."**

Beginning an exercise program often leads to fairly quick payoffs, like weight loss and fewer aches. But it's natural for the progress to gradually slow with time. "Your muscles eventually adjust

to this new level of activity," says Dr. Rosenthal. To shake things up, mix your regular routine with new workouts. Or rev up your walk with intervals – alternate a few minutes of brisk pace with your normal moderate stride. A 2007 study in the *Journal of Applied Physiology* found that women who did an hour of intervals on a stationary bike – four minutes of sprints, followed by two minutes of recovery – burned 36 percent more fat than those who maintained a steady pace.

You may need to kick-start your mind, too. Remind yourself how exercise improves your life on a daily basis. According to a 2011 study published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, people who reminded themselves of these little benefits – like having more energy or feeling less stressed – were more likely to stay motivated than those who focused only on long-term goals, like better health and a slimmer physique.

**excuse #8** | **"It's been so long since I've exercised, I don't know where to begin!"**

If it's been a while since you last laced up your sneakers, you might need a refresher course from a personal trainer who can show you how to do exercises and suggest workouts. "Learning the proper form and technique is important for preventing injury," says Rick Schultz, MD, the chief of surgery in orthopaedics and director of the musculoskeletal care division at Scott & White Healthcare in Round Rock, Texas.

It's important to find a qualified expert with experience working with people who have arthritis. Seek out someone with a four-year undergraduate degree in an exercise-related field and a certification from a reputable organization, such as the American Council on Exercise, National Academy of Sports Medicine or American College of Sports Medicine. "Ask what kind of specialized education and experience he or she has training people with arthritis," says Dr. Schultz.

**excuse #9** | **"I'll start tomorrow."**

You woke up with every intention of hitting the gym. But after your day got busy, you decided to put it off until tomorrow. Sound familiar? To snap out of the procrastination cycle, make a plan. "At the start of each week, schedule your workouts into your calendar," suggests Dr. Rosenthal. "Have walking or exercise dates with friends, so you won't back out."

Setting small goals, like exercising a certain amount each week and treating yourself when you meet them, can provide extra motivation. According to a study published in 2012 in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, employees spent less time on the couch and more time exercising when they were offered cash incentives for healthy behaviors. So give yourself healthy rewards, like new music or clothes for your workouts – and you'll be more inspired to get moving. <sup>AT</sup>

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