



Winter Physical Activity Tips for People with Arthritis

With cold temperatures, shorter daylight, and snowy or icy conditions, it can be difficult to maintain fitness routines during winter. Yet, being physically active year-round is good for both physical and mental health. For people with arthritis or joint pain physical activity can ease arthritis pain, increase strength and flexibility, boost energy and improve overall quality of life.¹ Joint friendly winter outdoor activities include walking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and 'fat bike' trail riding. Sometimes ski areas offer demo days to try out these activities and some libraries around Vermont have snowshoes that people can borrow.

For those who can and want to get outside:

Pay attention to the forecast. Try to get out on sunnier or warmer days. Be prepared with extra layers in case clouds or snow moves in.

Think about timing. Pay attention to when joint stiffness is worse – for many it is in the morning. If this is you, hold off exercising until later in the day. To warm your joints up faster, try putting your workout clothes in the dryer for five minutes while you get ready.

Dress in layers. Wear a thin synthetic (not cotton) first layer, if you can. Add a turtleneck or layer of fleece, and top with a breathable outer layer. Be sure to protect extremities with hats, neck warmers, gloves or mittens. If you are walking, make sure you **have sturdy footwear** and consider using traction devices that can be found in many outdoor shops.

Begin work-outs by **warming up** and after, spend time **cooling down**. March in place or walk slowly and stretch gently before and after. This will help loosen up joints and will give muscles added flexibility, which is especially helpful for people with arthritis.

¹ 10 Tips for Cold Weather Exercise *Linda Melone* Arthritis Foundation website, <https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/healthy-living/physical-activity/success-strategies/10-tips-for-cold-weather-exercise> December 2021.

Don't forget to **hydrate** – drink plenty of water before and after your activity - and **use sunscreen**. Even in the cold, a sunny day can result in sunburn, and some anti-inflammatory medications can make your skin more sensitive to the sun. As an added precaution, let someone know where you will be and how long you plan to be out.

For people who prefer to be active indoors:

Being active indoors has many advantages. You don't need all those layers and there are fewer hazards (ice, sudden change in conditions). It is still important to consider timing – be active when your body feels best. Wear appropriate footwear and clothing to maximize comfort and safety and remember to drink plenty of water.

Try using **online videos** such as these [exercise videos](#) from the Arthritis Foundation or join a free, virtual Chronic Disease Self-Management or Chronic Pain Self-Management workshops through [My Healthy Vermont](#).

Check out local resources. See if your town's rec department offers classes for adults or ask if a local school will allow public access to “walk the halls” or use the gyms evenings or weekends. Investigate your regional [Area Agency on Aging](#). Many offer a variety of arthritis appropriate evidence-based interventions (AAEBIs) such as the Arthritis Foundation's Aquatics Program, the Arthritis Foundation's Exercise Program, and Walk with Ease (WWE).

Have fun finding what works for you to stay active all year round!