

Barriers to exercise and physical activity

Barriers are things that get in the way of us being physically active and/or doing the exercises that have been prescribed by a health professional.

BARRIERS CAN INCLUDE:

- Bad weather
- Feelings of laziness
- Other people's opinions (including your doctor) who don't like to see you hurting
- Getting a cold or flu
- Christmas!
- Pain
- Fear of falling
- Feeling like you are not physically capable of exercising
- Negative thoughts ("exercise won't help me anyway")
- And so on...

Some barriers you can anticipate and plan for with some prepared strategies. Others you will discover as you try to stick to your exercise and physical activity plan and then fail to achieve it. You will get better at finding ways to overcome barriers with time and determination.

For each problem, you might think of several possible solutions. Try one and if it does not work, try something else. Some solutions may take some time to work out. Be creative and don't be afraid to try out ideas even if they seem a little crazy.

Time as a barrier

Lack of time is the most common barrier. To help overcome time issues preventing you from achieving your physical activity/exercise plans, it may help to have a good look at your daily routines. You may be able to come up with creative solutions. Look for small windows of time that you are free to take a short walk, for example. Plan when you will do your

exercise session by scheduling it ahead of time in your calendar.

The other important way to overcome time as a barrier is to ensure that physical activity is right up high in your list of priorities. Think about how a stronger, less painful joint and better overall health will benefit all the other aspects of your life!

Pain as a barrier

It is common for people to feel pain in their joint, or in the muscles, during exercise or for a short period of time following exercise. This is normal and does not indicate that their osteoarthritis is getting worse or that exercise is not good for their osteoarthritis. However, pain should not be severe or lasting. If you get unacceptable pain (moderate to severe intensity) during an exercise, or increased pain and swelling after exercising that lasts through to the next day, something about your exercise program needs to be changed. You should back off a little and perhaps discuss modifications to what you are doing at your next physiotherapy visit. You could leave out an exercise if it seems that one in particular is causing the problem, or you could try cutting back to doing half the number of sets/repetitions of the exercise.

Low energy or fatigue as a barrier

People tend to find that exercising actually gives them more energy once they've managed to get themselves started. While you might feel tired initially, as you continue you will start to feel more energised. Also, people often sleep better and therefore feel less tired during the day. Regular exercise and physical activity can help break the negative cycle of feeling tired and doing less activity, which leads to feeling even more tired and lethargic.

Do not enjoy exercising

There are very few people who are lucky enough to actually enjoy exercising just for the sake of exercising. There are many forms of exercise and physical activity; it often comes down to choosing activities that you dislike the least. Boredom can be a real problem in maintaining enjoyment and motivation. Vary your exercise routine. Keep a look out for other ways you can be physically active that you might enjoy a little more, at least for a while.

There are also ways that you can help make physical activity a more pleasurable experience. For instance, meet a friend for a walk or join a group, walk or ride in a beautiful place, listen to music that lifts your spirits while you are doing your exercises.

Caring for others

This not only takes up time but it takes up your emotional energy too. Sometimes you can feel guilty for putting yourself first even for a little while. But by keeping physically active yourself, you are preserving your own physical and mental health so you will be better able to help your loved ones over the longer term.

Sickness

Everyone gets sick from time to time. It's OK to stop your exercise routine while you are sick and recovering, but it is surprisingly hard to get back going again after a break. When you are on the mend, start thinking ahead and make a plan or set a date for when you are going to start adding your physical activities back into your daily routine again. You might need to build up gradually all over again, but it is worth it. The activity will probably help speed up your recovery and will certainly help maintain your health over the long term.

Holidays

Holidays disrupt routines and can cause set-backs if you don't plan ahead. Sometimes holidays provide new opportunities to vary your exercise routine or try new types of physical activity. Try doing some research before you go and make some plans on how you can build some activity into your holiday. You might plan to ask the hotel reception staff on your first day there to recommend a nice local walk. You might plan to hire some bikes for a day, or book a walking tour. A break from your routine is not such a bad thing as most people will get bored with doing the same thing over and over. When you come home, make sure you set a date for resuming your exercise and physical activity back into your daily routine.

Strategies to overcome barriers

Reminders

If you have a tendency just to forget to exercise, you can try some little tricks like leaving your shoes or exercise clothing out where you can't miss them, leaving yourself notes or setting alarms or reminders, or scheduling activities into a calendar or diary. Most smart phones have reminder and calendar applications naturally built into them that can be used along with alarms to help remind and reinforce exercise routines.



Rewards

Some people find a reward system really helps them to keep motivated to do something they don't feel like doing. Examples of rewards include:

- Giving yourself points each time you achieve an exercise goal and planning to do something nice for yourself each time you reach a target number of points.
- Rewarding yourself with some relaxation time with a book or a nap.
- Set yourself some targets and plan a treat such as a new pair of (walking) shoes when you reach your target.

Be creative with your rewards (but don't reward yourself with a week off!).

Social support

Enlisting someone to help you do your exercises or become more active can help you stick to your plan. Even better, if you and your buddy do it together, you can help motivate each other.