

Ask the Doctor

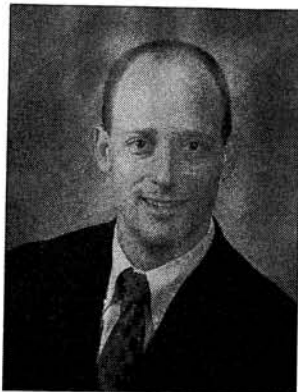
How can I reduce my arthritis pain during the long winter months?

Among the many pleasant things that come with winter there are often some less desirable effects that many of us must deal with this time of year. As the weather changes some of us are able to detect these changes within our arthritic hips, knees and shoulders. The aches and pains of arthritis can become more debilitating during the colder seasons.

Arthritis, as we recall, occurs when the lining of a joint diminishes for a variety of reasons. The ensuing stiffness, pain, and overall discomfort often progress over years.

During the winter months arthritis symptoms can be alleviated somewhat by maintaining as active and healthy a lifestyle as possible. Water aerobics and swimming are mainstays to arthritis therapy. The buoyancy of the water helps minimize joint stress (ie pain) while the resistance provided from the water promotes muscle strengthening—which helps the body. Also popular in the winter months are recumbent bikes (easy on the back and good for the legs) and elliptical machines. Whichever exercise you select, be sure to choose from those you find enjoyable as well as accessible.

Other important activities include those that keep the leg muscles strong so that the legs can maintain support of the upper body. The quadriceps muscles, front of the thigh, are the most important stabilizers in the leg. The stronger we



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keep this muscle group the more stable the lower extremities will remain and thus potentially minimize arthritis pain. Consider straight leg raises and isometric quadricep contractions for maintaining quadriceps strength.

And do not forget that three times one's body weight goes through the lower extremity joints with each step. A healthy diet is crucial for one's daily strength as well as preventing other health problems. Therefore, during the winter remain diligent in maximizing the opportunity to remain healthy. By remaining fit through fun and enjoyable activities you can maximize your comfort while minimizing the negative effects of arthritis.

If you have a question you'd like to Ask the Doctor, send it to: Arthritis Foundation, 615 N. Alabama, Suite 430, Indianapolis, IN 46204. Or send your question via e-mail to: tsander@arthritis.org; representative questions and answers will appear in a future issue of *Arthritis Action*; letters may be edited for brevity. We regret that the experts cannot answer medical questions personally.

The information contained in this article is not meant to replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment from your physician. If you're in need of a doctor, please log on to indiana.arthritis.org and click on the *Physician Referral List* tab.

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