

## Session 6: long-term management

After the six-week programme, progress will be checked. You will then continue exercises on your own at home or in a gym.

Keeping active after the programme is very important. Try to find activities you enjoy. This makes it easier to keep exercising regularly.

Local gyms, leisure centres, and community centres offer classes for all ages and abilities. These can help you stay active and reach your goals.

### Useful information

Arthritis UK (formally Versus Arthritis)  
[www.arthritis-uk.org](http://www.arthritis-uk.org)

Live well Dorset:  
[www.livewelldorset.co.uk](http://www.livewelldorset.co.uk)

To read this leaflet in a different language, please visit our website:  
[www.uhd.nhs.uk/visit/patient-information-leaflets](http://www.uhd.nhs.uk/visit/patient-information-leaflets) and use the language and accessibility function available along the top of the site.

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# KneeFit Education topics

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## Introduction:

### Session 1: what is arthritis?

**Osteoarthritis (OA)** is a condition that affects the joints. It is a progressive condition. This means it gets worse over time.

In a healthy joint, the ends of the bones are covered with a smooth layer called **cartilage**. Cartilage works like a cushion. It helps the joint move easily. It absorbs shock when you move.

With osteoarthritis, the cartilage slowly becomes thinner and rougher. This means the joint can't absorb shock as well as it used to. The body tries to fix this by growing extra bits of bone around the joint. These are called **bony spurs**. They can change the shape of the joint and may cause pain, but not always.

The muscles around the joint can become weaker. This can make the joint feel less steady. The tissues that hold the joint together can also become tighter and thicker. This can cause stiffness and make it harder to move. Sometimes the joint can become swollen and irritated.

Osteoarthritis used to be called a 'wear and tear' condition. We now know it affects the whole joint, not just the cartilage. A better way to think about it is 'wear and repair' because the body is always trying to protect and support the joint.

## Session 5: flare-ups

A **flare-up** is a short-term increase in pain, stiffness, or tiredness. Flare-ups are normal in osteoarthritis and can last days or weeks.

Flare-ups do not mean the condition is getting worse. If pain feels very different from usual, speak to a healthcare professional.

### Causes of flare-ups

- Doing too much activity
- Illness or infection
- Stress
- Injury
- Sudden weight gain

### Managing pain and flare-ups

- Start with simple pain relief and increase only if needed
- Use **ice** for swollen joints
- Use **heat** for stiff or tight muscles
- Try options like TENS or acupuncture
- Use rest without stopping activity completely
- Manage stress and weight

Over time, pacing, exercise, and pain management can help reduce flare-ups.

## Session two: benefits of exercise and setting goals

Many people worry that exercise will damage their joints if they have arthritis. This is a common worry, but it is not true. Exercise may feel uncomfortable at first, but it does not harm your joints. In fact, exercise is one of the best ways to manage arthritis.

**Pain does not always mean damage.** Feeling some pain or discomfort during or after exercise does not mean you are hurting yourself. Your body may just be getting used to moving more.

### Benefits of exercise

Regular exercise can help by:

**Managing weight** - exercise helps you lose weight or stay at a healthy weight. Even small weight loss helps. For example, every 1 kg of body weight adds about 4 kg of pressure through the knees and hips with every step.

**Improving mood** - exercise releases 'feel-good' chemicals in the brain. These can help improve mood, reduce stress, boost confidence, and help with sleep and pain.

**Strengthening muscles** - stronger muscles help support your joints and reduce pressure on them.

**Reducing stiffness** - moving your joints helps them feel less stiff and improves movement.

**Improving balance and daily activities** - exercise makes it easier to walk, climb stairs, and get up from a chair.

## How a healthy weight helps the knees

- 1. Less pain** - losing weight (if needed) can reduce arthritis pain and improve movement.
- 2. Less pressure on joints** - losing 0.5kg of body weight can reduce about 2kg of pressure on the knees with every step.
- 3. Slower joint damage** - weight loss can slow changes in joint cartilage.
- 4. Less swelling** - body fat releases chemicals that increase swelling. Reducing body fat can help reduce pain.

### Diet and nutrition

A healthy diet means eating a variety of foods, including:

- fruit and vegetables
- bread, rice, pasta, and potatoes
- protein like meat, fish, eggs, beans, or lentils
- dairy or dairy alternatives

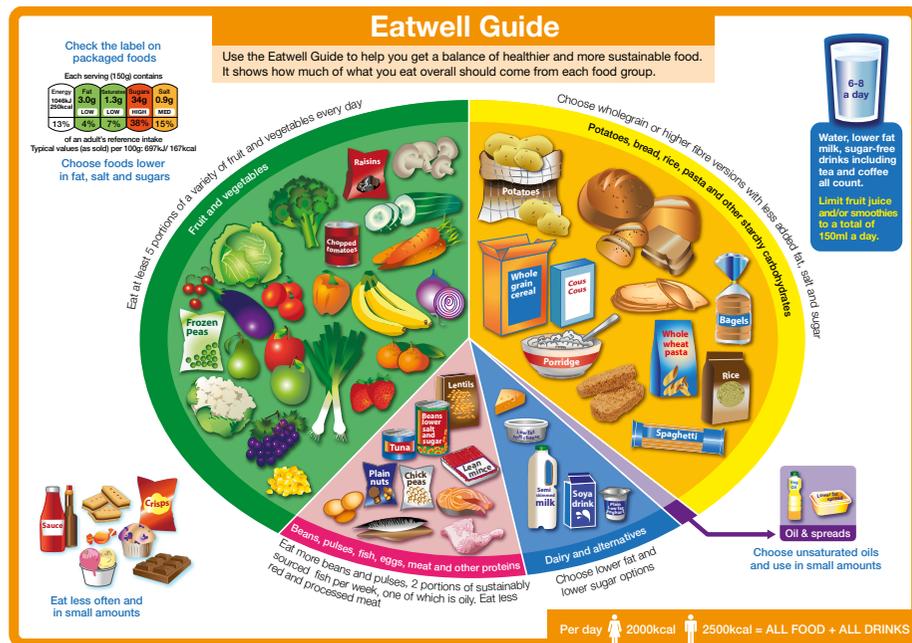
**Fruit and vegetables** - aim for at least five portions a day.

**Healthy fats** - oily fish like salmon and mackerel contain healthy fats that may help joints.

**Salt and sugar** - try to limit salty and sugary foods.

## Other healthy habits

- **Drink enough water** - about 6-8 glasses a day
- **Stop smoking** - helps reduce swelling in the body
- **Limit alcohol**
- **Keep moving** - movement helps joints stay flexible
- **Sleep well** - good sleep helps with pain and energy



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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Osteoarthritis can affect any joint. It most often affects the hands, knees, hips, lower back, and neck. Changes in joints are common as people get older. However, X-ray changes do not always match how much pain or stiffness a person feels.

### What factors can affect osteoarthritis?

**Age** - osteoarthritis (OA) is more common as people get older. Many people over 50 have signs of OA on x-rays. It is a common cause of pain and difficulty with everyday tasks.

**Gender** - osteoarthritis affects more women than men, especially in the hands and knees.

**Weight** = carrying extra weight puts more pressure on joints like the knees and hips. This can increase pain and make OA develop faster.

**Joint differences** - some people are born with joints that are shaped differently, or they develop joint problems as children. This can increase the chance of OA later in life.

**Previous injury** - injuries like broken bones or surgery near a joint can increase the risk of osteoarthritis in the future.

**Work and repeated movements** - some jobs put repeated pressure on certain joints, such as lots of kneeling or lifting. Normal daily movement does not cause OA. Heavy strain over time may increase the risk.

**Not moving enough** - being inactive can lead to weight gain, weaker muscles, and more joint pain. It can also increase the risk of other health problems.

## Goal setting

Setting goals helps you stay motivated and focused. Goals give you something to work towards. They do not have to be only about exercise, but activity-based goals can be helpful.

Goals can be:

- **short-term** (days or weeks)
- **medium-term** (months)
- **long-term** (months or years)

A helpful way to set goals is the **SMART** method:

- **Specific** - clear and simple
- **Measurable** - you can track it
- **Achievable** - realistic for you
- **Relevant** - important to you.
- **Time** - time bound (have a deadline for achieving this goal)

**Example goal:** walking to the shops with less pain and tiredness within three months.

## Session 3: pacing

### What is pacing?

Pacing means balancing activity and rest during the day. It helps you avoid doing too much or too little.

Without pacing, people may do a lot on 'good days' and then feel very sore or tired afterwards. This can lead to resting too much on other days. This is called the 'boom and bust' cycle.

Pacing helps spread activities more evenly across the day and week.

### Benefits of pacing

Pacing helps you to:

- spread activities out
- reduce flare-ups
- keep active without increasing pain
- build stamina slowly
- feel more confident about moving

## Pacing tips

**Know your limits** - everyone is different. Try to understand how much you can do. Writing down activities and symptoms can help.

**Prioritise** - focus on what matters most. Break big tasks into smaller steps.

**Plan ahead** - choose the best time of day for harder tasks. Get enough sleep and eat well.

**Be consistent** - using pacing regularly helps reduce flare-ups and keeps you active.

## Session 4: healthy lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle helps your whole body. It can reduce arthritis pain. Making healthy choices can help you move better and feel better.

Keeping a healthy weight is important. It can reduce joint pain and lower the risk of conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and sleep problems.

**Improving overall health** - being active helps lower blood pressure. It also reduces the risk of heart disease, lung problems, and diabetes.

## Exercise guidelines

Adults should aim for either:

- **150 minutes of moderate exercise per week, or**
- **75 minutes of harder exercise per week**

This can be broken into shorter sessions, such as 30 minutes on five days each week.

## Strength exercises

Strength exercises should be done **1-2 times per week**.

These can include:

- bodyweight exercises
- free weights
- resistance bands or machines
- everyday activities like climbing stairs, carrying shopping, lifting children, or gardening