



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5534

www.adph.org

Moderate physical activity helps people with arthritis

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Linda Austin
(334) 206-5603

Now that many popular, pain-relieving arthritis drugs have been taken off the market, the Alabama Department of Public Health reminds people with arthritis that there are still treatment options.

Charles Thomas, director of the Pharmacy Unit of the Alabama Department of Public Health, said, "There are still effective medications available for the treatment of arthritis. For the most effective treatment for an individual, a person should contact his or her physician."

Even without the use of medication, studies show that people can take actions to decrease the pain associated with arthritis. Moderate physical activity can be the arthritis pain reliever for the 42.7 million Americans who have arthritis, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More than a million people in the state of Alabama have arthritis.

Physical activity helps people with arthritis by reducing joint pain and stiffness and increasing flexibility, muscle strength, fitness and endurance.

Research shows that becoming more physically active can help people with arthritis feel less pain, move more easily and do more, feel more energetic and positive and keep their muscles, bone and joints healthy. In fact, lack of activity can actually make joints even more stiff and painful.

Most people who stay with a program of regular physical activity begin to feel better within four to six weeks. Low-impact activities at a moderate pace, such as walking, swimming and riding a bicycle, are recommended. Everyday activities such as dancing, gardening and washing the car are also good.

Walking helps improve energy and heart health. Swimming puts less stress on joints and also strengthens the whole body. Bicycling increases stamina. A stationary bike offers all the fitness benefits of outdoor riding without the traffic and other outdoor hazards.

Health experts advise people to start slowly and gradually work up to 30 minutes a day, three or more days a week. Some activities may be more comfortable by starting with gentle stretching. Start and end activities at a slower pace to give the body the opportunity to warm up and cool down.

Another benefit is that regular physical activity can contribute to a more positive mood, especially if family and friends are included in activities. A regular program of moderate physical activity should make it easier to do all kinds of everyday activities such as carrying groceries and getting in and out of the tub and the car.

The Alabama Arthritis Control Program's mission is to advance the health of Alabamians by improving the quality of life for those who have arthritis.

"Being able to work for a living, playing with children or grandchildren, doing chores around the house, or just maintaining independence, are among the concerns of people with arthritis," said Linda Austin, director of the Arthritis Branch, Alabama Department of Public Health. "There are three evidence-based self-management programs that can help persons with arthritis relieve pain, stiffness, and disability associated with arthritis."

One such program is the Arthritis Self-Help Course, which is a group education program on managing arthritis. The course is taught over a six-week period with one two-hour class each week. It offers the opportunity to share experiences with other group members and increases mobility by developing a personalized physical activity program.

PACE (People with Arthritis Can Exercise) is a specially designed exercise program for people with arthritis. The program consists of gentle activities to help reduce joint pain and stiffness and increase flexibility and endurance. PACE classes are usually held twice a week for eight weeks.

The Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program is a water exercise program designed for people with arthritis and related conditions. Water exercise (hydrotherapy) is particularly good for people with arthritis because it allows exercise without putting excess strain on joints and muscles.

Information about local resources is available on the Alabama Department of Public Health's Web site at www.adph.org/arthritis and class offerings are available by contacting the Arthritis Foundation, Alabama Chapter at 1-800-879-7896, or www.arthritis.org.

For more information, contact Linda Austin, Director, Alabama Department of Public Health Arthritis Prevention Branch, P. O. Box 303017, Montgomery, Ala. 36130-3017, e-mail, laustin@adph.state.al.us.

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