

Arthritis Answers Podcast #5

Bumps in the road part 2: Finding the place for exercise

Karen: Welcome to Arthritis Answers, presented by Boston University's ENACT. ENACT stands for the Center for Enhancing Activity and Participation among Persons with Arthritis. Thank you for interacting with ENACT! I'm Karen Jacobs, an occupational therapist, and a Clinical Professor of Occupational Therapy at Boston University and I'm here today with Sara Crandall, a candidate for the Doctorate of Physical Therapy degree at Boston University. We're bringing you the second in a two-podcast series about overcoming common barriers to exercise.

So Sara, what types of bumps do people run into with finding a place to exercise?

Sara: This is a common problem for people who are starting out with exercise and may know what they want to do. But figuring out where to do it may be tricky. Place can also be important if you're been exercising for a while and you're in a rut. It may be time to try something, or somewhere, new. We'll walk you through some popular options today.

Karen: So if people feel motivated to exercise, what is one option for a place to do it?

Sara: So the first place to consider is right at home. This is also helpful if you find that you're pressed for time. You can perform exercises that you do every day, like stepping up stairs or standing up from a chair. These are not only great alternatives to the gym, but the benefits will transfer into your daily life. Often you can find inexpensive equipment for your home, like stationary bicycles or hand weights online or at yard sales. Walking is a great activity you can do at home, in your neighborhood, or around malls and stores.

Karen: Sara, home really is a good place to consider. So how about some other settings...What about a gym? What should people with arthritis consider when choosing a gym?

Sara: When choosing a gym, consider your priorities: is it important to you for it to be close to home? Inexpensive? Offer a variety of classes? Maybe have a pool? Research suggests that people are more likely to go to gyms that are nearby. So pay attention to the commute, but make sure that the gym meets your needs and values. At the gym, make sure equipment is easy to access. You shouldn't have to go up and down stairs to access equipment if stairs are difficult for you. You should be able to ask someone how to use or adjust machines. If you want to take classes, make sure the gym offers low-impact,

joint-friendly classes that fit into your schedule. Many gyms offer specific programs for people with arthritis.

Karen: Sara, that was really good information. And it was exciting, as you were talking about this, to think about Boston University's FitRec. It really is a great place to exercise in. So if you join a gym, and decide that you need a little bit of help, such as, wanting to use personal trainer, what questions should you ask?

Sara: So first, don't feel like you have to hire a personal trainer. If you have a basic idea of what you want to do, your gym should have people who are able to show you the equipment or help you adjust it. Personal trainers can take more time to set up an exercise program with you and can help you stay motivated to complete it. Trainers may also be able to briefly screen you for heart symptoms before you begin, and help you monitor your response to aerobic exercise. They can modify exercises to fit your needs, and show you how to set up equipment. If you have pain when doing most exercises, it might be more appropriate to talk to your doctor or another healthcare professional than to hire a trainer.

If you choose to use a personal trainer, you want to make sure they're certified. Certification requires that they pass exam that covers the knowledge base needed to be a personal trainer. Look for a "C-P-T" title, which stands for Certified Personal Trainer. Most personal trainers do not have specific training in arthritis, but it may be helpful to hire someone with a little extra arthritis experience or education. Some examples are of specialties are "medical exercise specialist", "post rehab specialist" or "fitness specialist for older adults." We'll have a link in the show notes with more details the on these titles.

Regardless of the credentials, your trainer should consider your goals and motivations. They should be able to alter your program to fit your needs. If an activity is painful, they should adjust something or change the exercise to decrease pain. They shouldn't encourage pushing through the pain or doing fast paced jumping-type activities.

Karen: You know Sara, this was really important information, because I've always thought that I would want to go to a gym if there was a personal trainer waiting for me. But this really helped me see that, I probably could do it on my own.

Karen: So, what other options are out there besides using the home and gym for exercise.?

Sara: So one way to find a place to exercise is to join a community program. They provide the space, social support, and advice to support your exercise. Community programs are held in community centers, senior centers, local health centers, gyms, or churches. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend several evidence-based programs for people with arthritis. The names of these are: the Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program, Enhance Fitness, Active Living Every Day, Fit and Strong, Walk with Ease, and the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program. The Arthritis Foundation also offers a tai chi program and a general exercise program. We'll put links in the show notes to these and other safe programs for people with arthritis. Call around, ask friends, and check local newspapers... it might surprise you how close some of these programs are to you!

Karen: Wow, those were great options. But, what other options exist for people who live in places are kind of remote, kind of far away from the recommended programs that you were just describing?

Sara: So your first option is to look at community groups and churches that may offer walking groups or low impact exercise classes. You could also start up your own walking group or video-based exercise group with friends and neighbors. Many people want to exercise more and are just looking for a comfortable, safe setting to start in. You may be surprised at how many people are willing to start up a group with you! You can also become certified to teach one of the community programs that we mentioned earlier. Many of these programs train non-exercise-professionals to become instructors. Being an exercise instructor with arthritis can be motivating for you as well as inspiring to others.

Karen: That really is a great idea. And I do like that idea of it being something that would be motivational for you, but could inspire others to do the same.

Karen: Sara, what are some ways to bring in fun when the standard gym or group exercise program starts to feel boring?

Sara: So it can be fun to try something that you've never tried before. A new sport or activity can get you out of that exercise rut. Based on your resources, consider water aerobics, cycling, or tai chi. If you like sports, there are low impact sports that are safe for most people with arthritis. The key here is to start slow, and avoid activities that increase your symptoms. So try bowling, golf, or doubles tennis. If you're in the mood for competition, sign up for a charity walk or swimming competition that you can train for. Dancing is another fun activity that can be enjoyed anywhere with anyone, at any level.

You can sign up for a dancing class with a partner or friend- it's a great way to learn something new, express yourself, and get your exercise in!

Karen: Sara, I'm going to disclose that I dance a lot around my apartment. Just put music on and dance. And that's something that my physician actually told me to do. And it is a fun way to exercise.

Karen: So Sara, thanks so much. Today's podcast had some great ideas! Is there anything else you'd like to share with listeners?

Sara: Well, it's important to remember to find somewhere and something to do that you like. Everyone is different, and it's not always easy to predict what you will or won't like. If you're signing up for a gym, start with a two or three month trial membership. If you're signing up for a class, see if you can attend or watch a class before you decide to join. Get out there and try new and different things... you can find exercise that works for you, in a place that works for you. But you'll never know unless you try!

Sara: In our show notes for today, we'll have some links to community programs for arthritis, things to consider for a gym, and some of our references we used for the show. Don't forget to check out our message board on Facebook, where you can share your ideas and get great ideas from other people with arthritis about how they overcome obstacles to exercise.

Karen: Everyone, thanks for listening! And please keep in mind that you really just need to try. If you'd like to give feedback, ask questions, or let us know of topics that you're interested in, please send an email to enact (e-n-a-c-t) @ bu.edu. Please remember that our website www.bu.edu/enact (e-n-a-c-t) is there for lots of show notes, information about the center, and a list of online resources. Please make sure to check out the rest of Arthritis Answers series, and subscribe to receive upcoming episodes. Future topics include strategies to sustain your career with arthritis and rehabilitation interventions for arthritis.

Until next time, stay active!