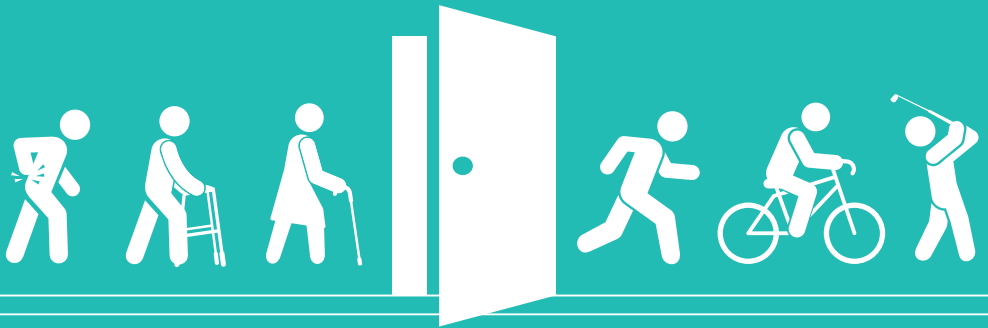




Blackrock Clinic

DEPARTMENT OF  
ORTHOPAEDIC  
& SPINAL SURGERY

# *Physiotherapy for Bone and Joint Health*



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# Clinical Excellence, Personal Care

## Physiotherapy for Bone and Joint Health

*Physiotherapy is an important part of treatment for most people with arthritis. It helps you to keep your joints and muscles moving and gives you the confidence to continue exercising on your own. In this booklet we'll explain what physiotherapy is, how it can help you and how you can access it in Blackrock Clinic.*

*Most people with arthritis will benefit from a course of Physiotherapy. This may include a programme of exercises tailored to your individual needs, advice on increasing your activity level generally or help with pain relief techniques.*



## What is Physiotherapy?

Physiotherapy helps improve general fitness and muscle strength, manage pain and improve function in parts of the body affected by arthritis and related conditions. Physiotherapists are part of a team of healthcare professionals who can help you to resume or maintain an active and independent life both at home and work. They are experts in assessing movement and can show you how to protect your joints. Your physiotherapist will be able to offer advice and reassurance, helping you to feel confident about managing your condition and addressing any concerns or uncertainties.

Specialist physiotherapists will have had training in diagnosing and treating joint and muscle problems, and your GP may refer you to a specialist physiotherapist rather than to a rheumatologist or orthopaedic surgeon. Your physiotherapist will start by making a thorough assessment of the problem. They will do this by asking you questions and examining the joint(s) you are finding painful. This assessment will allow the physiotherapist to suggest a programme of treatments and exercises tailored to your individual needs.

### PHYSIOTHERAPY TREATMENT MAY INCLUDE:

- A programme of specific exercises
- General advice on increasing your activity level and avoiding exercise related injuries
- Pain-relief treatments such as heat or ice packs, TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation), massage, manipulation, acupuncture or taping
- Providing walking aids or splints to help maintain mobility and independence



**MOST PEOPLE WITH ARTHRITIS WILL BENEFIT FROM A PROGRAMME OF PHYSIOTHERAPY**

### HOW CAN PHYSIOTHERAPY HELP?

Physiotherapy can help you to:

- Understand how arthritis affects you
- Manage your pain
- Improve your fitness
- Keep as mobile as possible
- Improve your overall strength and flexibility

## UNDERSTANDING HOW ARTHRITIS AFFECTS YOU

A physiotherapist can help you to understand what happens to your joints and muscles when you have arthritis. Understanding your arthritis will help you to manage its effects.

## MANAGING YOUR PAIN

Arthritis can cause pain in one particular part of the body or it may cause more widespread joint and muscle pain. Medications will help, but a physiotherapist can advise you on other strategies that will work alongside your medications.

## PACE YOURSELF

Overdoing things can increase your pain, but so can not doing enough. Your physiotherapist can advise you on increasing your activity level at a rate you can cope with and on finding the right balance between rest and activity. Planning your activities so that you don't overdo it will enable you to enjoy the things you want to do.

## REGULAR EXERCISE

Bone is a scaffold that supports the body against the forces of gravity and resists the pull of the muscles to allow movement. These loads and forces ensure that the skeleton remains able to resist the everyday burdens imposed upon it. **Bone is a living tissue that reacts to increases in loads and forces by growing stronger.** It does this all the time, so **exercise will only increase bone strength** if it increases the loading above normal levels. Younger, active people produce more new bone tissue than they lose, and therefore their bone density increases.

Generally we achieve maximum bone density and strength (peak bone mass) around the age of 30. Bone density gradually begins to decline as we age, and most of us also become less active. For women, bone loss is usually most rapid during the first few years after menopause.



**EXERCISE, HEALTHY EATING AND OTHER LIFESTYLE CHANGES CAN SLOW THE BONE LOSS THAT USUALLY OCCURS AS WE AGE AND MAY HELP TO REDUCE THE RISK OF OUR BONES BREAKING.**

Take regular graded exercise, graded exercise starts slowly and increases in small steps. This will help to strengthen your muscles and joints and increase your fitness. Improving your general fitness and stamina will help you to increase your level of activity without increasing your pain. Regular exercise will also stimulate production of your body's own natural pain-relieving hormones (endorphins).

**A physiotherapist may also recommend various pain-relief treatments. You'll be able to continue with some of these treatments yourself between appointments.**

- Ice packs can be used to soothe hot, swollen joints.
- Heat packs will help to relax tense, tired muscles.
- Splinting of swollen or painful joints may be helpful, for example during a flare-up of rheumatoid arthritis. Your physiotherapist or an occupational therapist (OT) may provide temporary splints for you.

## IMPROVING YOUR FITNESS

Keeping active is very important when you have arthritis. Joints are designed to move, and inactivity weakens the muscles and tissues around the joints. This can cause the joint to become unstable and may reduce your mobility and independence. Exercise can increase your general fitness, help you to lose weight or keep to a healthy weight, improve your general mobility and make you feel more self-confident. The important thing is to find a form of exercise you enjoy so you do it on a regular basis. Think about this and discuss it with your physiotherapist. They can help you plan a programme if exercise is new to you and advise on any special equipment or training that you'll need to get started. It's important to start exercising gently, pace yourself and gradually increase your activity. You may have a slight increase in pain when you first start, but this should improve as your confidence and strength increase.

## STRENGTH AND FLEXIBILITY

Arthritis can cause joint stiffness and muscle weakness, and this can affect your day-to-day activities. Your physiotherapist will assess your muscle strength and the range of movement in your joints, and advise on techniques and exercises to maintain the best possible function.

## HOW CAN I ACCESS PHYSIOTHERAPY IN BLACKROCK CLINIC?

You can self-refer to our outpatient physiotherapy department for a one on one bone health assessment or your GP can refer you to our Bone Health Service programme.

## Exercise Recommendations

**Children should undertake 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each day.**

**Adults should be doing 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity at least five days a week (or 150 minutes or more in total). They should also undertake physical activity to improve muscle strength on at least two days a week.**

**Older adults (over the age of 65) who are at risk of falls should also incorporate specific exercises to improve balance and co-ordination on at least two days a week and reduce the amount of time spent being sedentary (sitting) for extended periods.**

*(World Health Organisation, global strategy for exercise and health 2019)*

**THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS MAY BE ABLE TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL ADVICE AND INFORMATION:**

■ **Arthritis Ireland**

Clanwilliam Square, Grand Canal Quay, Dublin 2.  
Email: [info@arthritisireland.ie](mailto:info@arthritisireland.ie)

■ **Blackrock Clinic**

Rock Rd, Dublin. Phone 1800601060  
Email: [info@blackrock-clinic.ie](mailto:info@blackrock-clinic.ie)

■ **Irish Osteoporosis Society**

Burlington Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4.  
Email: [irishosteoporosis.ie](mailto:irishosteoporosis.ie)

■ **Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists**

St Stephens Green, Dublin 2. Email: [www.iscp.ie](http://www.iscp.ie)

■ **National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS)**

Unit B4, Westacott Business Centre  
Westacott Way, Littlewick Green, Maidenhead SL6 3RT  
Phone: 0845 458 3969 or 01628 823524  
Helpline: 0800 298 7650 [www.nras.org.uk](http://www.nras.org.uk)

*When your experience  
needs ours*



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