



# EXERCISE BEATS ARTHRITIS PAIN

## Hospital study reveals how it boosts patients' quality of life

By Nathan Rao

**MILLIONS of arthritis sufferers could drastically improve their condition with regular gentle exercise, new research shows.**

Doctors claim simply doing yoga, pilates or dance just once a week can provide dramatic relief from the agony of the disease.

The findings bring hope to millions of Britons who suffer from arthritis which causes painful, stiff joints and can be debilitating.

American doctors looked at the effect of weekly exercise classes on 200 osteoarthritis sufferers at the Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS) in New York.

They found participants could walk more easily, were less prone to falls or injuries and generally enjoyed a better quality of life after taking the classes.

The results support growing evidence that keeping active can vastly improve the lives of people with the condition.

Sandra Goldsmith, from HSS, revealed: "When participants were asked to report their level of pain severity, there were statistically significant reductions in pain from pre- to post-test. Pain is a huge factor in quality



Working out may improve quality of life

## Exercising gently can ease arthritis

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of life." The results of the study have been welcomed by doctors who said exercise is vital to improve the symptoms.

Nottingham-based GP Dr Ian Campbell said sufferers often avoid regular activity because of pain or fear of joint damage.

He said: "We are aware of the benefits of gentle exercise for people with arthritis, but this study backs up what we know to be very beneficial."

"Much of the time people with arthritis are afraid to exercise because it hurts but they need to know that if they can work through the initial discomfort they will see the improvement."

"Exercise can improve levels of mobility, and help with the pain of arthritis as well as self-esteem."

"The nice thing about these findings is that it is achievable across the board, even people with a level of disability can learn new techniques and see an improvement."

During the study people took tai chi, mat and chair pilates, yoga and dance fitness classes for a year.

Instructors tailored exercises for those with osteoarthritis and other musculoskeletal issues and oversaw the sessions. Before and after the classes 200 participants

were asked to give a measure of their pain, balance and mobility, and asked about any falls.

Around 62 per cent said after taking part in the classes their pain levels had begun to fall.

Researchers also found those in the study showed an improvement in general activity, mood, walking ability, sleep, normal work, and enjoyment of life.

Dana Friedman, from HSS, said: "We asked participants to rate their balance, and we found a statistically significant increase in those who rated their balance as excellent, very good or good, from pre- to post-intervention."

### Supportive

Linda Russell, rheumatologist at HSS, said: "Patients benefit from supervised exercise programmes with regard to their overall sense of well-being and pain due to their arthritis."

Medical research charity Arthritis Research UK welcomed the new findings.

A spokesman for the charity said: "We know that exercise is an effective way of managing the pain and disability for people with osteoarthritis."

"However, people need to know how to exercise, what is safe and also want a supportive environment to work in, as so many

people take up exercise but don't keep it up."

"Very few people in the UK go into hospital because of osteoarthritis, so hospital-based exercise classes may not be applicable in the UK - what we do need are more community-based classes."

Harley Street consultant Dr Malcolm Vandenburg said: "We know exercise, especially pilates, builds strength and improves mobility and can be beneficial to most people including the elderly."

"This is why it is beneficial to people with arthritis."

Osteoarthritis affects at least 8.5 million people in Britain and causes the cartilage between bones to waste away, leading to painful joints usually in the hands, spine, knees and hips.

Rheumatoid arthritis is more severe but less common, affecting almost 700,000 people.

It occurs when the immune system attacks the joints, causing pain and swelling, most commonly in the hands, wrists and feet.

There is no cure for either condition but the symptoms can be treated with anti-inflammatories and painkillers.

The new findings will be presented to the annual meeting of the American College of Rheumatology/Association of Rheumatology Health Professionals this month.