Six Rheumatoid Arthritis Exercises You Can Do Without Getting Out of Bed

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Six Types of Bed Exercises for RA

Rheumatoid arthritis is known to affect multiple joints and organs; it is a chronic inflammatory disease that causes pain, fatigue, and loss of mobility. In fact, it has been associated with a work disability in the United States. Studies indicate that those with RA for over 10 years have a higher chance of work disability – as high as 50% (though this has likely decreased in recent years due to advancements in treatment).

Can being active help reduce disability? Maybe, maybe not. However, it can make you feel a bit better – especially if you're active daily.

So, what about exercises that can be done first thing in the morning – in your own bed?

Exercise in Bed – What?

Exercising first thing in the morning allows the joints to become "lubricated" as the fluids in the joints are replaced by the movement. In addition, blood supply is increased to the joints – this increased circulation provides additional oxygen and nutrients.

So, why not just get out of bed, roll out a yoga mat, and get moving? Exercising in bed is a simple and highly accessible way to add stretching and exercises for RA into your daily routine. So… why not do bed exercises for RA!

Easy Bed Exercises for RA

Now that you understand the benefits of doing morning exercises for your joints, here are some six bed exercises you can do every morning to get your body moving and lessen the pain from RA morning stiffness.

The Cannonball

The cannonball strengthens the pelvic floor muscles. Strengthening the pelvic floor is key in strengthening the core – it helps to keep the spine aligned.

In order to do the cannonball:

- Lie on your back in your bed.
- Bring your knees to your chest.
- Place your hands on your thighs, then try to push your legs away while simultaneously resisting with your legs.

Perform this exercise for 10-15 seconds, eventually attempting to increase the hold for 60 seconds.

The Bridge

The bridge strengthens the hips, which are often weak in those with rheumatoid arthritis. They are also extremely important for many of the actions that we do each day, such as walking, standing, and using stairs.

- While lying in bed, plant your feet near your buttocks. Your feet should be approximately hip-width apart.
- Place your hands near your sides, then raise your bottom off the bed and squeeze your glutes.
- Hold the bridge for 2-3 seconds (longer if it feels good) and then slowly lower your bottom back to the bed.

Repeat about 10 more times, increasing to 30 repetitions as able.

Child's Pose

Naomi Sophia Call, a seasoned yoga instructor, uses child's pose as a beginning "bed" yoga posture for her patients at a chronic pain rehab clinic in the Scripps Health Network.

About yoga in bed, she states, "I've taught this to patients with debilitating pain and even people in their 90s, and the change in their flexibility and demeanor—they used to look so contracted—is dramatic."

To do child's pose:

- Sit upright on your heels in your bed.
- As you exhale, bend forward at the hips, reaching forward with your hands. Your forehead should bow towards your head, with your chest dropping towards your thighs.

You may place a pillow under your head, as well as under your buttocks to become more comfortable.

Leg Mobility

To maintain range-of-motion in the legs, perform the following exercise.

- Lying on your back with legs outstretched, lift one leg off the bed, bending the knee.
- Swing the leg with the bent knee back and forth, like a pendulum on a clock. This motion should be done within your range-of-motion.

When doing this exercise, the back should remain straight, and the pelvis should remain grounded into the bed.

Repeat 5-10 times, and then perform the exercise on the opposite leg.

Arm Exercise

Sitting on the edge of the bed, ensure that your feet are planted firmly on the floor. If your bed is too tall, get a footstool so that the feet are planted firmly.

- Lift the arms in front of you, then reach towards the ceiling.
- Bring the arms down and behind you.

Repeat these "shoulder swings" 3-5 times.

Wrist Warm-up

As the hands and wrists are often sore for people with rheumatoid arthritis, performing exercises to the wrist joints may help. This exercise can help lubricate the nine tiny bones of the wrist.

- Move your wrists up and down as far as possible.
- Move each hand in a circular fashion, both clockwise and counterclockwise.

Perform these exercises on the opposite hand, doing the exercises 5-10 times each on both hands.