Avoid Injury While Strength Training With RA

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Weight Lifting With Rheumatoid Arthritis

Though it may seem counterintuitive, weight lifting with rheumatoid arthritis can actually ease stiff and painful joints. Of course, change doesn't happen overnight, and you may have to deal with some discomfort in the beginning, but experts agree that it's well worth the effort for RA sufferers, considering the long-term benefits.

Pumping iron like a bodybuilder is probably not the best way to go about gaining the muscle you need to ease your pain. In fact, RA patients need to keep a few important points in mind to stay injury-free and get the wide array of benefits that come with a stronger body.

Benefits of Weight Lifting for RA Symptoms

Practicing high intensity exercise can have a profound effect on RA symptoms. A 2009 study out of Great Britain followed a group of patients with mildly disabling RA as they completed a progressive resistance training (PRT) program, and results were impressive; focusing on some traditional strength-training movements, such as bicep curls, seated rows and leg extensions, participants exercised three times a week for twelve weeks, and none experienced a flare. Moreover, each RA patient improved their endurance and lost fat in several areas.

Frequency and intensity are the most important features in a weight lifting with rheumatoid arthritis program because they ensure the steady increase of muscle mass. The more muscle you build around your joints, the less pressure they will take on, and that means you will experience less inflammation.

Tips for Healthy Strength Training with RA

Progressive resistance training involves keeping up with your own progress; you will need to increase the amount of weight, as your muscles get stronger and more conditioned. In order to get the most from your routine, you need to focus on form, format, and frequency:

- **Focus on form with helpful tools**. Good form is imperative if you want to prevent injury and build the right muscles. However, it can be difficult to maintain good form when you work out on your own, so begin with a visit to a physiotherapist or personal trainer that understands RA symptoms. Once you know how to perform the movements correctly, consider investing in a custom splint or brace to help you isolate a given muscle group and hold the proper position.

- **Opt for control over challenge**. Your weight lifting routine should certainly test your strength, but free weights can be difficult and dangerous to manipulate, especially if your joints are weak. Instead, use resistance bands, weight machines and your own bodyweight to get the resistance you need, and limit yourself to three sets of each exercise at a time. Your weight workout should only last between twenty to thirty minutes.
- **Rest well**. Many people fit three or four weight lifting sessions into their week, but that can be a big

misstep for people with RA. Some experts suggest starting with one session every four days, and slowly working up from there. Just like every body, your muscles and joints need a full day of rest to build and recuperate; unlike other people, too much work can send you into a flare and sideline you for weeks.

It’s important to keep a close eye on your joints and muscles during your strength training, and if any action feels particularly painful, look for a different exercise to target those muscles. Strength training for RA can be a learning process, but if you work with a knowledgeable trainer and stick to your schedule, you will continue to see results.