

# Boosting Physical Activity Among Adults With Arthritis



## Executive Summary

Arthritis affects 50 million adults and is the most common cause of disability in the United States. Currently, 22.2 percent of the adult (> 18 years old) U.S. population has arthritis. Comprising more than 100 different rheumatic diseases and conditions that affect joints and tissues, arthritis causes many Americans serious pain, aching, stiffness, and swelling. In 2010, the Arthritis Foundation (AF), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and partners collaborated to produce *A National Public Health Agenda for Osteoarthritis*. The agenda outlined a blueprint for recommended environmental (physical, social, or economic factors designed to influence people's practices and behaviors) and policy (laws, regulations, rules, protocols, and procedures designed to guide or influence behavior) intervention strategies to reduce the burden of this public health issue. Physical activity was one of the intervention strategies outlined in the agenda, and as a result, the Arthritis Foundation convened experts representing areas of expertise related to physical activity and arthritis, as well as various sectors that can influence physical activity levels, to outline key strategies.

The resulting report—*Environmental and Policy Strategies to Increase Physical Activity Among Adults with Arthritis*—focuses on the benefits of physical activity and ways to make physical activity more convenient and accessible for adults with arthritis, as well as the other long-established benefits physical activity has for co-occurring chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Although persons with arthritis have disease specific barriers to being physically active as well as high rates of comorbidities, physical activity is an important but underused intervention that decreases pain, delays the onset of disability, improves physical functioning, mood and independence, and enhances quality of life, aerobic capacity, and muscle strength.

The report is designed to engage six important sectors, including community and public health; health care; transportation, land use and community design; business and industry; park, recreation, fitness and sport; and mass media and communication, as partners with a mutual interest in increasing physical activity among adults with arthritis using environmental and policy strategies.

The report serves as a call to action for each of the key sectors to collaborate and focus more attention on helping people live well with arthritis and be a productive part of our society.



The table below highlights the list of top priority environmental and policy strategies that are:

- Most practical and doable
- Likely to have the greatest impact on adults with arthritis
- Able to be initiated within 1-2 years, and
- Sustainable over time.

<b>Priority Environmental and Policy Strategies for Improving Physical Activity Among Adults with Arthritis</b>	
<b><i>Community and Public Health</i></b>	Public health, aging services networks, faith-based organizations, and other community agencies should invest resources in the dissemination and delivery of evidence-based physical activity programs for adults with arthritis in convenient settings.
<b><i>Health Care</i></b>	Health care systems should require licensed health care professionals to ask arthritis patients about physical activity levels at every visit, screen for arthritis-specific barriers to physical activity, encourage physical activity, and recommend evidence-based community interventions or rehabilitation therapies when appropriate.
<b><i>Transportation, Land Use, and Community Design</i></b>	Policies should be put in place and reinforced to create or expand efforts to promote active living environments that can support adults with arthritis being physically active.
<b><i>Business and Industry</i></b>	Comprehensive worksite wellness programs should be inclusive and explicitly incorporate the needs of adults with arthritis in their programs without requiring disclosure of arthritis diagnosis.
<b><i>Park, Recreation, Fitness, and Sport</i></b>	Park, recreation, fitness, and sport professionals should receive training on how to adapt and modify physical activity programs and exercises for adults with arthritis and assist them in initiating and sustaining appropriate physical activity.
<b><i>Mass Media and Communication</i></b>	Available evidence-based physical activity interventions for adults with arthritis should be promoted through information, guidelines, signage, media promotion, and public outreach.

Note: The priority strategies are arthritis specific and intended to supplement more comprehensive strategies implemented in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the *National Physical Activity Plan*, the *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, and other general physical activity recommendations and applicable laws.

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## Co-Sponsors

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- American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
- American Chronic Pain Association
- American College of Physicians Foundation
- American College of Sports Medicine
- American Council on Exercise
- American Medical Society for Sports Medicine
- American Occupational Therapy Association
- American Physical Therapy Association
- American Society for Nutrition
- Center for Enhancing Activity and Participation Among Persons with Arthritis (ENACT) at Boston University
- Center for Research on Health and Aging at University of Illinois at Chicago
- International Council on Active Aging
- Hospital for Special Surgery
- Multidisciplinary Clinical Research Center in Rheumatology at Northwestern University
- National Alliance for Hispanic Health
- National Association of Chronic Disease Directors
- National Athletic Trainers' Association
- National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity
- National Recreation and Parks Association
- Shape Up America!
- Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
- Society for Women's Health Research
- Thurston Arthritis Research Center at the University of North Carolina
- United States Bone and Joint Initiative
- YMCA of the USA