

Overcoming joint pain

“Physiotherapy improved my pain and flexibility”

“About 4 months ago I went to see the doctor because I had a slight limp in my left leg. After a few flexibility movements which showed great inflexibility (!) he sent me to have my hips x-rayed and it was at that point that I officially became a sufferer of arthritis!

I have lifted weights since 1981 and have always presumed that my inflexibility in the hips area was due to shortened leg muscles. But over the last few years the left hip had become increasingly stiff – hence the limp when walking. A long term hip replacement was suggested as a possible remedy for my predicament but, having had a serious heart attack three years ago, the idea of returning to a hospital bed was the last thing on my wish list!

Having read that physiotherapy can help with arthritis, I booked in with a Physiotherapist about 3 months ago and he gave me a series of exercises to help strengthen the muscles around the hip and to improve flexibility. They have helped but are not easy! Usually I suffer the next day with a sore hip but the following day seems to be better. I have seen him 3 times now and he has noticed some improvement in the strength and flexibility of the left hip and has encouraged me to continue with 6 weekly visits. I work out in the gym about 4 times a week and have added to my routine an 8 mile bike ride about 3 times a week which I feel helps with hip flexibility. I find long distance walking uncomfortable - that range of motion seems to aggravate the hip whereas I could cycle for hours with no apparent pain after doing so. If, for whatever reason I am unable to exercise for a few days I definitely notice a stiffening of the hip – and can't wait to get back to the gym!



Osteoarthritis is a real condition. It is not going to go away on its own and there is currently no cure. At times it can feel quite overwhelming and, on occasions, absolutely exhausting. But it does not have to be the master of your life! I can be the master but that takes strength, effort and determination, because no one else is going to do it for you. The stretches are hard and exercise can be quite tiring, but it does help. Having to constantly explain yourself to people as they come up to you and say “have you got a limp” is very irritating so now I just tell them, “yes, I have an arthritic hip but I still have breath in my lungs – isn't that great!” The condition can be controlled but it takes great

effort to control it and not to get too low. But an extra mile on the bike, an extra 10 kilograms on the leg press machine, anything where I can sense a slight improvement is a real incentive to carry on and overcome.

The Osteoarthritis road is a difficult one so here are some tips that I feel would make that road less daunting for fellow sufferers:

- Do the stretching exercises and persevere because you CAN gain some flexibility and that in itself is an incentive to keep going.
- Exercise is CRUCIAL. Any movement that keeps the joint moving is going to help and exercise gives a sense of well being and being in control of your life.
- A positive attitude makes all the difference.
- Choose to take control and not be at the mercy of it. We are individual people and this is our life. Yes, perhaps a hip replacement is right for one person, and yet not for another. Osteoarthritis can be managed if we keep positive and put the effort in.
- Be gentle on yourself. Only you know deep inside how you are feeling and the condition can cause great fatigue, which in my case can just suddenly come upon me. If you need to rest, you need to rest regardless of what others think or expect of you. An hour's snooze can make all the difference, not just mentally but also by letting your body rest in a lying position. We feel guilty when we go for a nap because we feel we should be "jolly well carrying on regardless." But we have an illness that we never asked for and we have a right to rest when that illness fatigues us.
- Find osteoarthritis support groups to talk to others, and osteoarthritis exercise groups to keep moving alongside likeminded people. This is a lonely road and an opportunity to share with others on a regular basis about our ups and downs is of great benefit. "A problem shared is a problem halved." Exercising with other arthritic sufferers not only encourages us to keep going but also helps develop self confidence, fitness, friendship and support. What fun it could be if we were all able to regularly work out together in a safe and caring environment where we can all inspire each other to gain!

I am a highly motivated person. On the night of my heart attack I was already planning my gym return when consultants were telling me the long term diagnosis was very serious. 3 years later and I am still attending the gym 4 times a week! But many people struggle with self motivation, particularly if their illness has been long term and has drained the life out of them. However, there are many simple mental techniques that we can impart to others that will empower them to take control of their own lives and be an "overcomer."

So let's choose to empower one another and give one another the skill set to be self motivated! ””

