

1. What is the Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program?

The Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program (AFEP) is an evidence-based physical activity program conducted by trained and certified instructors in partnership with the local Arthritis Foundation chapter. The low-impact program is proven to reduce pain and stiffness, and help maintain or improve mobility, muscles strength, and functional availability. To accommodate different group needs, instructors select from 90 different exercises performed while participants are seated, standing or lying on the floor. Activities also include endurance-building activities, balance exercises, relaxation techniques and health education segments. An advanced level contains more aerobic conditioning activities and use of resistance bands and weights.

2. What are the program benefits/research, goals and objectives?

Research indicates the Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program can:

- Reduce pain and stiffness;
- Maintain or increase muscle strength;
- Improve balance and coordination;
- Decrease fatigue and increase endurance;
- Improve overall perceived health status.

AFEP is a multi-component program, using aerobic exercise, health education, relaxation, and socialization to address arthritis concerns and conditions. The program has the following general goals:

- Provide participants with an enjoyable, safe exercise program;
- Encourage positive social interaction among participants;
- Decrease depression and improve mood;
- Maintain or improve certain physical parameters depending on the choice of activities and exercises;
- Improve performance of daily activities;
- Increase participant's awareness of arthritis exercise principles, joint protection principles and relaxation techniques, and do provide participants with methods for incorporating these self-care skills into the home environment.

Reasoning behind the program design and elements

- Clinical researchers have proven unequivocally that physical activity reduces the risks of dying prematurely from heart disease, and of developing diabetes and colon cancer. It can help reduce high blood pressure for those who already have it, relieve feelings of depression and anxiety, help control weight, help build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints, and help older adults become stronger, more balanced, supple and more able to move without falling (Keenan & Hawkins, 2004, p.2).
- Regular exercise in older adults improves energy metabolism, and vigorous resistance training substantially increases strength. Long-term controlled trials of exercise suggest that it reduces the loss of bone strength (Buchner & Wagner, 1992, p. 10).
- Increased physical activity improves joint mobility, strength, fitness, range of motion.
- Peer interaction and socialization can help counteract feelings of depression and isolation.

- Behavioral change and educational programs can produce positive changes in self-care and mastery of chronic disease symptoms to increase functioning

3. What is the target population?

Anyone with arthritis or related rheumatic diseases or musculoskeletal conditions, ranging from people who are older, sedentary and very limited by impaired joint mobility to those who are relatively active with only mild joint involvement.

4. What are the essential program components and activities?

The essential program components are:

- Health Education
- Exercise
 - Joint Check warm-up
 - Range of Motion/Stretching Exercises
 - Strengthening Exercises (including optional use of resistance bands and weights)
 - Cardiovascular Endurance
 - Joint Check cool-down
 - Balance and Coordination Activities
- Relaxation and Breathing

5. What is the length/ timeframe of the program?

AFEP classes are usually one hour in length and meets one, two, or three times per week. For the class to be evidence-based and for participants to see results, it must be offered two or three times a week for eight weeks. A class series may be time-limited, typically six to eight weeks, or may be offered on an ongoing basis.

6. What is the recommended class size?

The recommended class size is 12-15 participants per instructor. Classes may be smaller as well. One certified instructor is required per class.

7. What are the instructor requirements?

When recruiting individuals to undergo the Exercise Program instructor training, look for applicants with the following characteristics:

- Background, education and/or relevant experience in an exercise, fitness or health-related field such as physical or occupational therapy, recreational therapy, physical education, nursing, exercise physiology, kinesiology, dance therapy or movement therapy. (A person's background in related education or work with the elderly, disabled or other special populations may be considered at the discretion of the Arthritis Foundation in lieu of this qualification.)
- Current certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is required, and first aid certification is strongly recommended.
- Affiliation with an agency that meets Arthritis Foundation facility standards.
- Other desirable abilities include:
 - Empathy towards people with arthritis and related diseases gained through personal or professional experience.
 - Interest in working with groups of people with arthritis and related diseases.

- Experience in teaching exercise classes and skill in group process and instructional techniques.
- Desire and ability to help others.
- Strong belief in the value of regular physical activity.

8. How do instructors get trained?

An instructor's certification will last for three years as long as they teach six 1-hour Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program classes **within six months** of being certified and then teach one 6-week program per year.

- The Arthritis Foundation will provide several trainings throughout the state each year. An instructor must attend the full 8-hour training.

9. What are the program costs?

The program costs depend upon the number of classes offered and instructors trained. Below are some typical costs to get the program started:

- Costs to train instructors
 - Initial certification is \$100
 - Recertification (after 3 years) is \$75
- Participant/class costs:
 - The Arthritis Foundation will help with marketing and advertising
 - Optional costs for group classes: any instructor or facility fees

10. What are the facility requirements for an AFEP class?

- The room should be large enough for easy movement and to allow space for assistive devices (walkers, crutches, etc.).
- The room should have adequate acoustics.
- There are to be no other concurrent activities in the room.
- The room should be free of clutter and have adequate lighting to reduce chances of falls or other injuries.
- The room should be carpeted or mats must be available if program includes floor exercises.
- The temperature should be comfortable with no drafts.
- There must be an accessible building entrance.
- Handicapped or other designated parking spaces must be within close proximity of entrance.
- Accessible exercise room and rest rooms.
- \$1 million liability insurance coverage

For more information or to attend a training, please contact:

Alison Eschweiler
 Health Promotion Coordinator
 Arthritis Foundation Upper Midwest Region
 1650 S. 108th Street
 West Allis, WI 53214
 414-329-4603 ext. 223
 aeschweiler@arthritis.org