# Achieving realistic physical activity goals benefits RA patients

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Researchers from The Netherlands report that patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) who have higher levels of self-efficacy for physical activity are more likely to achieve their physical activity goals. According to the study now available in *Arthritis Care & Research*, a journal of the American College of Rheumatology (ACR), achievement of physical activity goals is associated with lower self-reported arthritis pain and increased health-related quality of life (HRQOL).

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that RA, a chronic autoimmune disease causing inflammation in the lining of joints, affects nearly 1% of the world population. In the U.S., the ACR reports 1.3 million adults suffer with RA. Studies indicate that RA patients cite pain and stiffness as the most limiting factors of their illness, and report lower HRQOL than healthy individuals. RA patients who do not engage in regular physical activity have a more pronounced effect from the disease.

For the current study, Keegan Knittle, MSc, from Leiden University in The Netherlands and colleagues surveyed 106 patients with RA to assess physical activity, motivation and self-efficacy for physical activity, level of arthritis pain, and quality of life. After six months, participants were surveyed again and asked to indicate the extent to which they achieved their baseline physical activity goal. Previous research has shown that self-efficacy, described as one's belief in his or her own capabilities to perform a specific behavior, is associated with increased physical activity participation among RA patients.

Results showed that 75% of participants rated their physical activity goal achievement at 50% or more. Higher levels of self-efficacy for physical activity increased the likelihood that patients would achieve their physical activity goals, and goal achievement had a direct positive effect upon quality of life outcomes. Researchers found that patients who achieved their physical activity goal reported less arthritis pain and greater quality of life. No differences were found between men and women who completed the surveys, or between patients newly diagnosed versus those with RA for 10 years or more.

Knittle concluded, "Our results suggest that an increased focus on self-efficacy enhancement, realistic goal-setting, and techniques that increase the likelihood of goal achievement will assist clinicians and researchers develop interventions that have a positive impact on pain reduction and quality of life outcomes for RA patients."

**More information:** "Self-Efficacy and Physical Activity Goal Achievement Predict Arthritis Pain and Quality of Life Among Patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis." Keegan P Knittle, Veronique De Gucht, Emalie J Hurkmans, Thea PM Vliet Vlieland, Andre J Peeters, H Karel Ronday and Stan Maes. *Arthritis Care and Research*; Published Online: August 25, 2011 (DOI: 10.1002/acr.20587).

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