

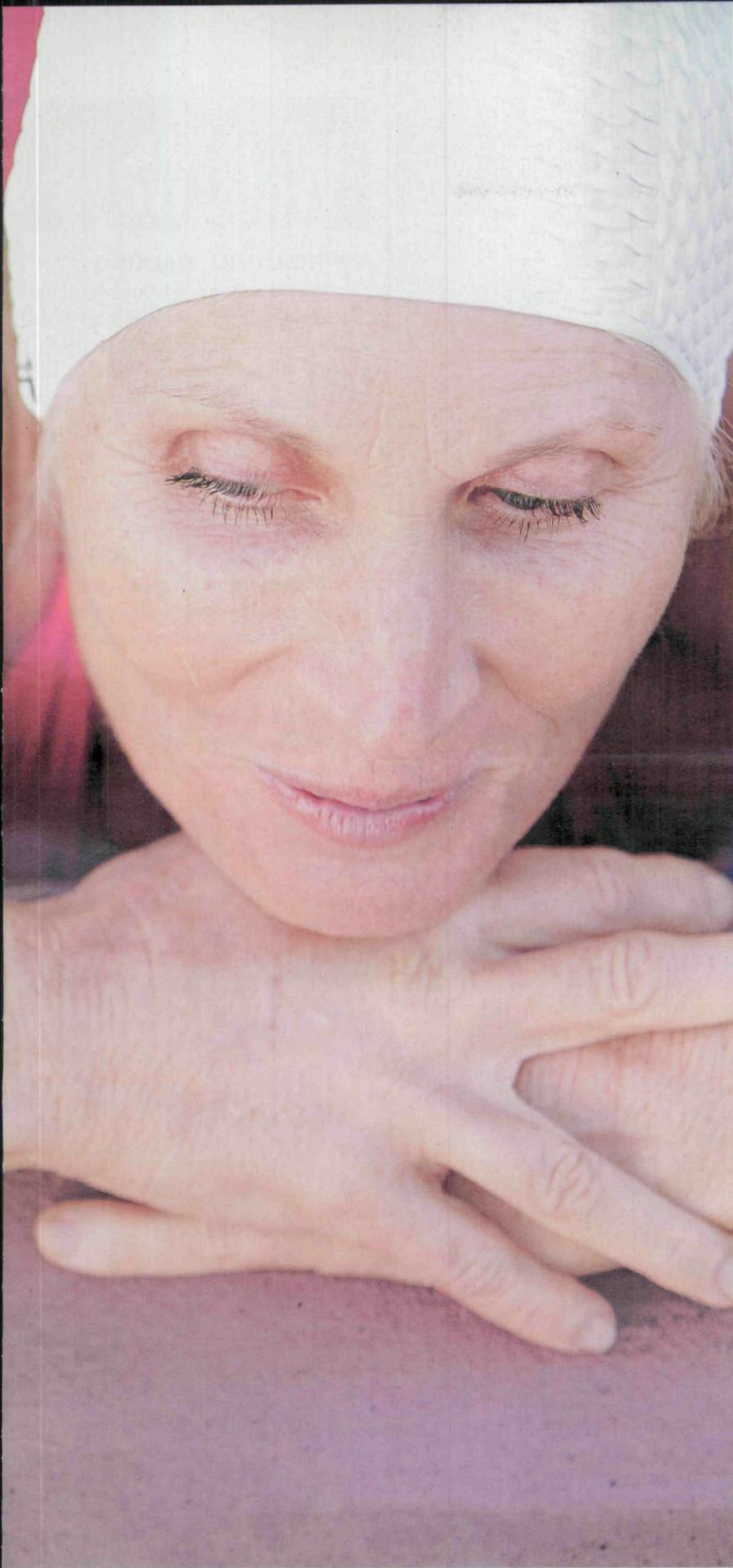
# 15 WORRY-FREE WORKOUTS

Try these joint-friendly ways to get fit and have fun. BY CATHERINE WINTERS

WHEN YOUR JOINTS HURT, YOU'RE PROBABLY NOT EAGER TO EXERCISE – even though you've heard time and again that you should. Not only does exercise keep joints strong and flexible, but it also promises pain relief for a host of conditions, including osteoarthritis (OA), rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and fibromyalgia. It also keeps pain from starting, helps you shed pounds and reduces stress.

Still not persuaded to get off the couch? Maybe that's because you haven't found the activity that suits you. That's about to change.

We went to experts for the lowdown on low-impact, joint-friendly and, dare we say it, fun ways to shape up. (Shuffleboard, anyone?) Whether you're an exercise newbie or just want to spice up your fitness menu, you're sure to find an activity in these pages that gets you excited to move.



# Diving In

## 1 WATER WALKING

**Why It's Good:** Walking in waist-deep water lessens weight on joints by 50 percent compared with walking on land, explains physical therapist Davis Reyes, assistant manager of the Joint Mobility Center at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City.

**Do It Safely:** Take a class with an instructor who can teach you proper form.

**Cautions (for all water exercise):** "Patients feel really good in the water, so it's possible to over-exercise, become fatigued and aggravate joints," says Reyes. Water exercise is often recommended for people who've had a joint replacement – but if you're one of those, wait until the incision has healed.

## 2 WATER AEROBICS

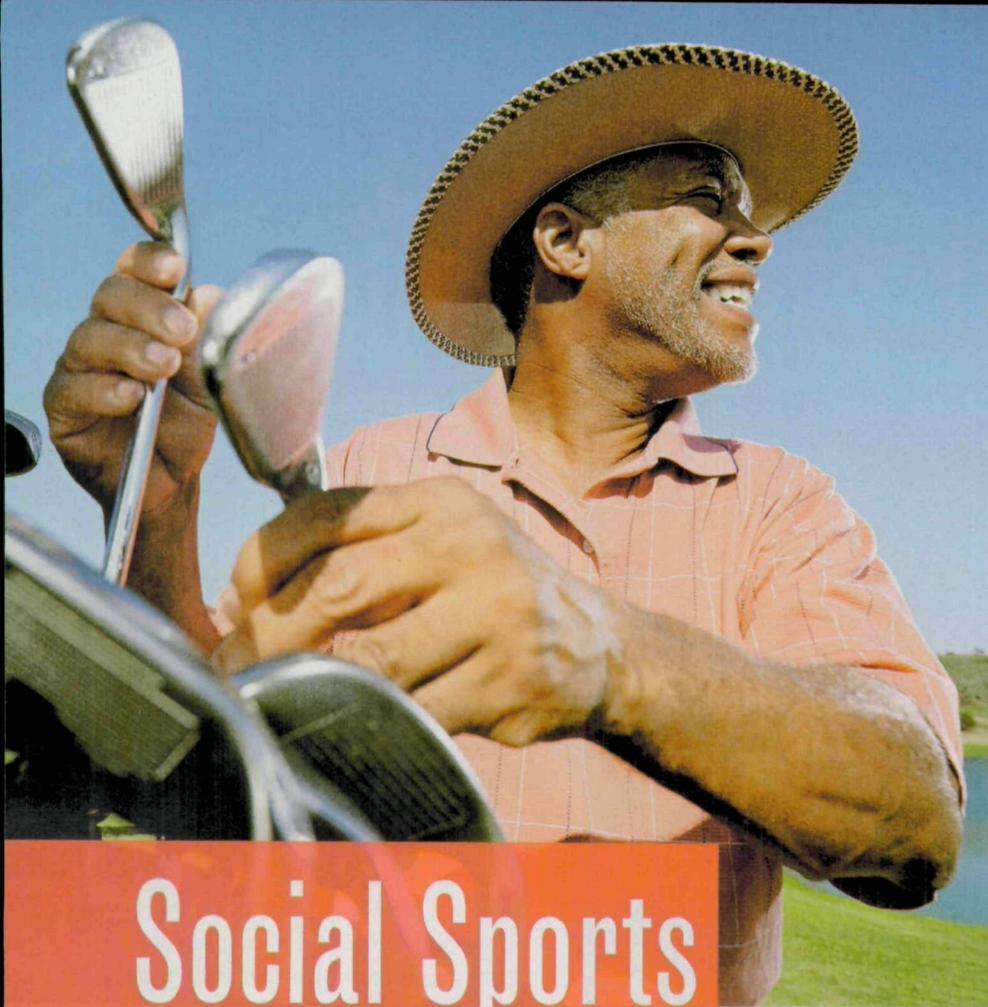
**Why It's Good:** Water aerobics, which involves your upper and lower body and mid-section, is usually done in chest-deep water, lessening impact on your joints by 75 percent compared with traditional aerobics, Reyes says.

**Do It Safely:** Warm up for five to 10 minutes with easy walking and arm movements – basically mimicking what you'll be doing – to loosen joints and relax muscles.

## 3 SWIMMING

**Why It's Good:** Swimming works all of your muscle groups and builds cardiovascular endurance.

**Do It Safely:** Learn to swim properly to minimize your injury risk, and choose a stroke that is most comfortable for your joints. For example, your legs are relatively straight in freestyle, making it a good choice for someone with hip or knee arthritis – unlike the breaststroke, which could aggravate pain in these joints.



# Social Sports

## 4 BOCCE

**Why It's Good:** Social activities that get you moving take your mind off pain while you burn calories and get stronger. Bocce is done in a relatively upright position, so bending and lunging are at a minimum, says Reyes.

**Do It Safely:** Don't bend your knee or extend your arm beyond a comfortable range of motion.

**Cautions:** Holding and tossing the bocce ball might aggravate hand, wrist, elbow or shoulder arthritis.

## 5 GOLF

**Why It's Good:** It works your upper back, legs, shoulders, wrists and hands. And if you don't rely on a motorized cart, you'll do lots of joint- and heart-healthy walking.

**Do It Safely:** Wear walking sneakers or golf shoes with soft spikes – unlike metal spikes, they won't grab the grass and trip you, says exercise physiologist Robyn Stuhr, sports medicine program director at the University of California San Diego Department of Orthopaedic

Surgery. Use clubs with a lightweight, graphite shaft and a perimeter-weighted head for better shock absorption, and pull them in a wheeled cart.

To warm up, stand in place and gently rotate your body to the right and left as you pretend to swing a club, says Stuhr. Try a few gentle swings with a light iron and then do the same with your heavier driver.

**Cautions:** Sometimes you have to scale back in order to enjoy the game long-term. If you hurt after a few holes, stop playing, Stuhr says.

## 6 SHUFFLEBOARD

**Why It's Good:** In "deck," or outdoor shuffleboard, you use your legs to lunge forward and your arms to push the cue and weighted puck.

**Do It Safely:** Wear comfortable, non-slip shoes. Don't overdo it and don't push yourself beyond a comfortable range of motion.

**Cautions:** This could aggravate shoulder or elbow arthritis if you push the puck hard, and knee arthritis if you lunge too deeply.

# Walk Ways

## 7 TREADMILL WALKING

**Why It's Good:** The treadmill enables you to go easy (and hold handlebars for support), pick up the pace or "climb" simulated hills, so you can vary your workout according to how you feel.

**Do It Safely:** Start slowly, 10 to 15 minutes at a time three or more days per week for a week or two, increasing duration by five to 10 minutes per week, advises Reyes. When you can comfortably walk 30 minutes on a flat surface, gradually up the pace and/or add an incline.

**Cautions:** Bumping up the incline beyond 5 to 10 percent could stress your joints.

## 8 WALKING OUTDOORS

**Why It's Good:** All walking helps relieve arthritis pain, strengthen muscles and reduce stress, but you also get the benefit of being outside – another proven stress reliever.

**Do It Safely:** Stick to smooth dirt trails if you can – they're kinder to joints than asphalt or concrete. Plus, "Walking on uneven terrain can aggravate arthritis in your hips, knees and feet," adds Reyes.

**Cautions:** Walking downhill can stress your knees.





## A Faster Pace

### 9 CYCLING

**Why It's Good:** Indoors or out, cycling works all the muscles in your lower body – even your feet.

**Do It Safely:** Adjust the seat height so that your extended leg is slightly bent. If you ride outside, wear padded cycling gloves to absorb shock, and avoid handlebars that cause you to hunch over, which increases stress on your hands, wrists and elbows.

**Cautions:** Upright stationary and outdoor bikes can aggravate back or knee problems. The solution might be a recumbent bike, which supports your back with your legs extended.

### 10 CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

**Why It's Good:** You can get a moderate to vigorous total-body workout. Unlike downhill skiing, there's little twisting and turning of the knees.

**Do It Safely:** A lesson is the best way to learn how to coordinate your arms and legs and how to fall and get back up with minimal strain.

**Cautions:** Not recommended for someone who has moderate to severe arthritis in the upper or lower body.

### 11 ELLIPTICAL MACHINE

**Why It's Good:** "Because part of the work is done by the machine,

and because your joints go through a fluid, circular motion, there's less stress and strain on your lower body," says Reyes.

**Do It Safely:** Start with 10-minute sessions for the first few weeks, increasing time by five to 10 minutes a week. Begin at the lowest (easiest) slope and resistance settings.

**Cautions:** If you have balance or coordination issues, this might not be the machine for you.

## Strong and Steady

### 12 PILATES

**Why It's Good:** Done on a floor mat or machine, Pilates stretches the spine and strengthens muscles.

**Do It Safely:** Try a one-on-one session with a certified teacher or find a class that addresses arthritis needs. Always move within a pain-free range, and work at your own pace.

**Cautions:** If you have osteoporosis, don't

bend forward with a curved back as it could up your risk of fracture, says Rebekah Rotstein, a Pilates instructor in New York City who offers classes specifically for people with bone and joint issues.

### 13 STRENGTH TRAINING

**Why It's Good:** Gentle strength training builds bone and strengthens muscles around joints, improving your stability.

**Do It Safely:** Consult a personal trainer or physical therapist to learn the proper way to lift free weights or use resistance machines, and to learn how much to start with. If you strain muscles easily, try resistance bands or simply contracting and then relaxing different muscles.

**Cautions:** Using the wrong technique or too much weight can worsen arthritis pain or cause injury.

### 14 YOGA

**Why It's Good:** A slow-paced class that emphasizes proper form, as Iyengar yoga does, improves flexibility, strengthens muscles and reduces stress. Recent studies found that yoga improves fibromyalgia symptoms and reduces disease activity in RA.

**Do It Safely:** Learn a comfortable resting pose to do in lieu of those that might cause discomfort. If you have severe arthritis, consider a chair yoga class.

**Cautions:** Certain moves can strain affected joints; if you feel discomfort, modify the pose or assume a resting pose.

### 15 TAI CHI

**Why It's Good:** This mind-body martial art improves balance and reduces stress and arthritis pain.

**Do It Safely:** Wear comfortable footwear with support. If your range of motion is limited, ask the instructor for modified moves.

**Cautions:** Although tai chi is suitable for almost everyone, doing the moves while standing might not be best for people with severe arthritis or balance issues. 

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