



Evidence-Based Community Programs

Help Your Patients Take Charge

Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program (AFEP)

AFEP—formerly called People with Arthritis Can Exercise (PACE)—is a group recreational exercise program developed by the Arthritis Foundation that is now supported by the Aquatic Exercise Association. AFEP promotes physical activity as a strategy for managing arthritis symptoms and improving or maintaining mobility, strength, and physical function. **Encourage your patients to sign up for the program at a location nearby.**

Who is it for?

- AFEP is designed for people with arthritis who want to safely increase their physical activity levels.
- The program may also benefit people with other chronic health conditions who want to be more active.
- AFEP can be tailored to a range of ability levels—from people who are sedentary with limited joint mobility, to those who are relatively active with only mild joint impairment or other symptoms.

How is it conducted?

- AFEP is held at recreation centers, senior centers, and other community facilities.
- The program meets in small groups of 15–20 people for 1 hour twice a week. Participants can take AFEP for 8–12 weeks at a time, or on an ongoing basis.
- Instructors begin each AFEP session with a brief health education component to review topics important for managing arthritis.
- Instructors then lead participants through a series of range-of-motion, stretching, strength-building, and conditioning exercises. The exercise component also includes balance and coordination activities, as well as relaxation and breathing techniques.
- All activities are safe for people with arthritis and can be modified for different skill levels. The intensity of the exercises can also be adapted to accommodate physical limitations. AFEP activities can be performed while participants are seated, standing, or lying on the floor.

What are the qualifications of the instructors?

- AFEP is led by health and fitness professionals who have completed a multi-component, blended Web-based and in-person training.
- Instructors are certified in CPR and lifeguard or water safety, and have experience in the exercise, fitness, or health fields.

What are the benefits?

- In preliminary evaluations of AFEP, participants experienced symptom relief such as reduced pain and fatigue, less depression, and increased confidence in their ability to manage their arthritis and remain active in their daily lives.¹
- A randomized, controlled trial of AFEP funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed these findings, particularly in participants who attend more than half of the class sessions.²
- No safety concerns have been reported in the published literature.¹⁻²

Summary of the Evidence

Author, Year	Design	Participants	Outcomes
Minor MA, Prost E, Nigh M, et al. (2007)	RCT* comparing 8-week with 16-week PACE† Outcomes assessed at 8 and 16 weeks, with followup at 6 months	174 participants with rheumatic disease	Outcomes similar for both groups at 8 weeks: ↓ pain, fatigue ↑ self-efficacy, physical function Improvements in physical symptoms sustained at 6 months
Callahan LF, Mielenz T, Freburger J, et al. (2008)	RCT of 8-week PACE program Outcomes assessed at 8 weeks with followup at 6 months	346 participants with self-reported arthritis	↓ pain, fatigue ↑ self-efficacy ↑ use of upper/lower extremities

*RCT = randomized controlled trial

†PACE = People with Arthritis Can Exercise

Selected References

¹ Minor MA, Prost E, Nigh M, et al. Outcomes from the Arthritis Foundation exercise program: a randomized controlled trial. *Arthritis and Rheumatism*. 2007;56(suppl):S309 [abstract 724].

² Callahan LF, Mielenz T, Freburger J, et al. A randomized controlled trial of the People with Arthritis Can Exercise Program: symptoms, function, physical activity, and psychosocial outcomes. *Arthritis and Rheumatism*. 2008;59(1):92–101.

Fees and Location

AFEP is a low-cost program. Fees per session may vary by location. Check www.apta.org/Arthritis to find current locations.

For More Information

Aquatic Exercise Association
www.aeawave.com

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/arthritis/interventions.htm