

# Juvenile Arthritis

Arthritis is not just a disease of the elderly. Childhood arthritis or juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) affects one of every 1000 Canadian children under the age of 16. It is among the most common chronic childhood disorders. In some children, it can last for as little as several months to a year and then disappear forever, while others will experience an up-and-down course of their JIA (flare-up and remissions) for many years.

**Although there currently isn't a cure for JIA, there is effective therapy**

With proper management most children with this disease lead healthy active lives and enter adulthood without any major physical disability. In some forms of the disease, children can go into complete remission as they grow into adulthood.

The treatment approach for JIA emphasizes the involvement of a multidisciplinary healthcare team, including a family physician, rheumatologist, social worker, psychiatrist, dietitian, occupational therapist and physiotherapist. Drugs, such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), steroids, and the recently emerged biologics, have a major role in controlling inflammation and the disease process that occurs in JIA. Rehabilitation treatment, such as, physiotherapy has an important adjunctive role in the management of JIA. Physiotherapy aims to prevent physical impairment and restore functional ability through education and exercise.

## What is Juvenile Arthritis?

JIA is an autoimmune disease (one in which the body fights itself) that causes continuous inflammation of the one or more joints lasting at least six weeks for which no other cause can be found. The inflammation results in stiffness, swelling and pain. The exact cause of JIA is unknown.

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## Physiotherapy Can Help

A physiotherapist is an important member of your child's multidisciplinary healthcare team. A physiotherapist will work with you and your child to reduce pain; restore mobility, function, strength and flexibility; prevent unnecessary disability; and help your family cope with JIA in everyday life.

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) represents physiotherapists, physiotherapist assistants and physiotherapist students across Canada. CPA members are rehabilitation professionals dedicated to the health, mobility and fitness of Canadians.

Physiotherapists are primary health care professionals who combine their in-depth knowledge of the body and how it works with specialized hands-on clinical skills to assess, diagnose and treat symptoms of illness, injury or disability.

More than 20,000 registered physiotherapists work in Canada, in private clinics, general and rehabilitation hospitals, community health centres, residential care and assisted-living facilities, home visit agencies, workplaces, and schools.

## Reducing Pain

Physiotherapists can help reduce pain caused by JIA:

- With specific therapeutic modalities;
- By recommending the use of assistive devices, such as splints; and
- Prescribing a proper exercise program that will maintain function of joints and decrease pain in joints by strengthening the muscles surrounding them.

## Exercise Program

If your child has JIA it is very important that he/she exercises. Exercise can help reduce pain and prevent further joint damage. Stretching and strengthening exercises can help reduce pain, prevent loss of joint movement and support the joint. Generally speaking, low impact activities, such as riding a bike and swimming, are also recommended.

