

Exercise and pain

Information for you



Your physiotherapist may suggest some simple exercises in order to help you increase your activity levels and achieve your goals.

For example, John's long-term goal is to start bowling with his friends again. He has broken this down into 'do-able' chunks and is currently working on a graded walking plan. His physiotherapist suggests it might be useful to do some simple exercises to build-up the strength in his leg muscles.

Regular stretching and exercise will help keep your joints lubricated and supple. It will also help build-up the muscles which support your joints and improve your balance and co-ordination. Another advantage of exercise is that it stimulates the production of feel good chemicals called endorphins which help relieve pain, tiredness, stress and improve mood.

People often tell us that they don't have any time to do exercises. However, exercises can be really simple things. For example, John's physiotherapist suggested some step-ups on the bottom stair. He built this into his day and did ten every time he went upstairs.

Work out your starting point

- In the same way as you did with graded activity, work out how much of each exercise you can do now, on a good or bad day, without stirring up your pain at the time or later.
- The most common mistake people make is that they try to do too much to start with, "no pain, no gain". This winds up the nervous system and is why some people incorrectly think that exercise makes their pain worse.
- It's better to do too little to begin with, be able to manage it and then to increase it.
- Stick to your plan. Don't be tempted to keep going if you are having a good day.

- If you are struggling on a bad day, don't give up. Try and do the number of exercises you planned to, but maybe do less movement or exert less effort when you do them. You may find it easier to chunk the exercises up throughout the day.
- Build up gradually, increasing the amount you are doing every second day. Keep increases small but consistent.
- A little increase in your symptoms is normal, to be expected and should settle quickly. Remind yourself that you are not causing any harm.
- Write up your plan for the week ahead on the charts your physiotherapist has given you.

Exercise and pain as part of a series of reliable, evidence-based advice to support you along the way to improving your function and quality of life, with pain.

Further leaflets in this series are available on the NHS Ayrshire and Arran MSK Service website: <https://www.nhsaaa.net/musculoskeletal-service-msk/>

Pain during your exercise

Aim to keep your pain under 5/10 during exercise. If your pain is over this, then you can modify the exercises by either; reducing the amount of movement during an exercise, the number of repetitions, reducing the weights, reducing your speed or increasing rest time between sets.

0= no pain 10=worst pain imaginable

0 – 3 Minimal Pain	4 – 5 Acceptable	6 – 10 Excessive
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Pain after Exercise

Your pain or other symptoms should return to your pre exercise baseline within 30 minutes of exercising. You should not feel an increase in your pain or stiffness the next morning. Although, sometimes it is normal to feel some muscle soreness from doing exercise that you have not been used to.



Exercise record

Name

Start date of plan

- Decide your starting point for each exercise. This is how much you can do now, on a good or bad day without stirring up your pain at the time or later.
- Decide how you are going to progress. Try and increase by a small amount every other day.
- You should feel confident that you can achieve your plan.
- Try to stick to the plan on good or bad days. Tick it off when you have done each day's amount.
- Review it at the end of the week and set the next week's plan. Progress the next week's plan according to how you got on overall from the last week.

Exercise	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
For example, step-ups	30	30	32	32	34	34	36

Further information is available from:

Pain Management Service <https://www.nhs.uk/pain-management-service/>

Pain Association Scotland www.painassociation.com

Pain Concern www.painconcern.org.uk