



Managing Exercise when you have Chronic Pain

Information for patients



WHY EXERCISE?

Exercise is recommended for your general health. It is also recommended for chronic pain, for mood problems and for conditions such as osteoarthritis. The benefits of doing exercise include:

- ❖ Better cardiovascular health- heart, lungs, circulation
- ❖ Increased bone density
- ❖ Improved flexibility and muscle strength
- ❖ Release of ‘feel good factor’ chemicals which are also your body’s natural painkillers
- ❖ Studies have shown that doing exercise in the long term is associated with a better outcome for people with chronic low back pain
- ❖ Exercise can be used with better diet to reduce weight in those who are overweight.

Exercising when you have Chronic pain can hurt. It can also lead to a flare up if you start doing a lot of exercise suddenly without building up to it. Your physiotherapist can help you to find the right level of exercise for you when you start out.

It can be helpful to notice what else is getting in your way of exercising.

- ❖ Motivation levels - not able to do what you used to be able to do, so what’s the point?
- ❖ Ability - already struggling with basic tasks at home?
- ❖ Conflicting advice about what you can and cannot do?

Discuss this with your physiotherapist when you’re starting out.

TIPS FOR STARTING EXERCISE WHEN YOU HAVE CHRONIC PAIN

Here are some tips to help you get started with exercise when you have chronic pain.

Reassure yourself

Chronic Pain doesn't mean that you are doing something wrong or damaging yourself when you feel it on movement or exercise, but it does mean that you have to be realistic about your ability when you are starting to exercise.

Start Gradually

Try to take a gradual approach where you start slowly, just doing a little bit and then build this over the next few months. If you start and have a lot of pain afterwards, take note of how much exercise you did and make sure that you start at a lower level next time. If you rush into doing a lot of exercise that you are not used to doing you may have a 'flare up'.

Pace your exercise

Like housework, or any other activity that you do, it is a good idea to break down your activity into chunks that you can realistically manage. It's a good idea not to exercise on days that you have a lot of activities planned. Within your exercise, try breaking up strengthening with stretching.

Have a prompt

When starting to increase your physical activity levels, it is a good idea to have a prompt to remind you to do it. Examples - when boiling the kettle do 1 minute of stretching or when the advert of your favourite television programme comes on march on the spot for 30 seconds. Or set a daily reminder on your phone.

Using your Pain Medications

It is a good idea to get into the habit of taking your medications regularly and making sure that you have taken them before you exercise. Don't worry about masking any damage- you will not do this with your medications.

Using your medications to help you to get started with exercise is a good way to use them to help you achieve a goal.

Pick something enjoyable:

Choose a type of exercise that you think you will enjoy and that you would like to try. You don't need to go to the gym- you can do it at home. It might be something that a friend does and you fancy giving it a go, or it might be doing a bit of an exercise video/ DVD, or a class that is on at a local leisure centre.

Use your local leisure centre

If you do want to go to the gym, speak to your local leisure centre about your abilities and ask what classes/ gym times may suit. If you are going to a class, let the instructor know that you have chronic pain and be prepared to tell them about chronic pain and what you can and can't do.

Reward yourself

Reward yourself for the progress that you make. It will be a challenge to change your routine and increase your physical activity. Try not to let feelings of frustration or guilt about prioritising yourself get in the way. Exercise is recommended for your health.

RESOURCES IN THE COMMUNITY TO HELP MAINTAIN PROGRESS WITH EXERCISE

There are over 30 leisure centres across South and North Lanarkshire. These centres offer a variety of leisure options, such as gyms, swimming pools, classes and health suites and have different levels of accessibility.

There are different payment options such as pay as you go, memberships and discounts available.

Classes range from options such as body balance to active age, tea dance and circuit classes.

More information can be found at www.sleisureandculture.co.uk for South Lanarkshire or www.nleisure.co.uk for North Lanarkshire or by dropping into your local leisure centre.

The 'Active Health Scheme' runs a variety of classes for people who need support to get in to exercise due to chronic pain and other health conditions. Classes are offered free of charge and available throughout Lanarkshire. This scheme is a referral only class and so to speak to your physiotherapist about a referral. This scheme is a referral only class, so speak to your physiotherapist about a referral.

NHS Lothian have produced exercise videos designed for people with Chronic Pain - this provides sitting and standing options for different abilities

[https://services.nhslothian.scot/painmanagement/Pages/Pain-Management-Programme-\(AAH\).aspx](https://services.nhslothian.scot/painmanagement/Pages/Pain-Management-Programme-(AAH).aspx)

The Physiotherapy Pain Association has created a list of links, including video links to gentle exercise including chair yoga, tai chi, strength and balance.

<https://ppa.csp.org.uk/content/keeping-active>

The NHS website also has a range of instructor led videos including aerobic exercise, strength, yoga and pilates.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/?fbclid=IwAR0Gzib-aPSrmn5iSGwEdmXJV8wSNXrpNWHNOyTSI444I6wIODGEDbQBHacs>

- ❖ Make your activity enjoyable for you
- ❖ Set yourself short and long term goals to do with your exercise
- ❖ Reward yourself frequently
- ❖ Practice pacing, planning, prioritizing (what could be done)
- ❖ Keep a diary and record your progress
- ❖ Learn a new skill
- ❖ Join a leisure group (wide variety of groups in Lanarkshire)
- ❖ Tell others how they can help you, thus building your support team
- ❖ Read this regularly to help you stay motivated

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