



York Teaching Hospital  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Benefits of exercise and making it part of your lifestyle

Pacing activities and goal setting

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:  
**Physiotherapy Department**

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Caring with pride



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## Introduction

When people have joint or muscle problems they often become less active due to pain, or fear of aggravating their pain. Unfortunately inactivity can result in more problems such as tight muscles and weakness.

Reducing your tolerance to exercise can also add to pain and disability. Therefore it is important that you do exercise.

## The benefits of exercise

- Improves mood and reduces stress by releasing endorphins. These are the body's feel good hormones and natural painkillers.
- Strengthens muscles.
- Improves flexibility and reduce stiffness in joints.
- Improves cardiovascular fitness.
- Improves sleep.
- Improves balance.
- Improves general health by maintaining a healthy weight, lowering cholesterol and reducing the chance of getting type 2 diabetes.
- Boosts energy levels.

## Where to start

Start slowly at a low level of exercise and gradually increase. Stretches are often the best exercise to start with.

Don't be tempted to increase your activity levels too quickly, as you may make your condition worse.

Increase your exercise when you can perform the current level consistently without causing your symptoms to get significantly worse.

Remember, discomfort associated with any new activity is normal, however this should settle quickly after exercise.

Make time to exercise. It is an important part of managing your condition and should be incorporated into your daily routine

Find an exercise or activity that you enjoy and that you will stick at.

Have fun!

## **Types of exercise that can be useful:**

- Stretches
- Cycling
- Walking
- Swimming/water exercise
- Pilates
- Tai chi

Attending a group or exercising with a friend can often make it more fun.

## **Pacing your activity levels**

Learning to pace your activities can enable you to cope with the demands of daily living, without increasing your levels of pain or exhausting yourself. Remember activities can be physical but also have a mental or emotional content.

Pacing does not mean you have to give up activities or spend lots of time resting. Over time pacing can help you gradually increase activity levels and reduce feelings of frustration by making life more predictable.

To help remember the main ideas of pacing remember the four P's:

### **Prioritising:**

- Make a list of tasks that need to be done that day or week.
- Organise them by importance.
- Can the activity be done by someone else, family or friend?
- Does the task have to be done?

## **Planning:**

- Make a plan of when you are going to do the activities.
- Spread activities out over your day or week e.g. vacuuming one room a day, not the whole house.
- Try alternating physically demanding activities and those that are less mentally difficult and vice versa.
- Consider changing habits and routines e.g. if you always get dressed and then have breakfast, you may find it easier to sit and rest after breakfast before you get dressed.

## **Pacing:** Work out a baseline for activities.

- Your baseline is the length of time you can do an activity before your pain gets worse e.g. if you are able to walk for 30 minutes before the pain increases, your baseline for walking would be 30 minutes.
- Baselines need to be rigid so you don't increase your pain and go back to your over/under activity cycle.

## **Problem solving:**

Look at your activities and see if they can be done a different way which is easier e.g. sitting down to iron, using frozen vegetables so you don't need to prepare fresh ones.

## Golden rules of pacing

- Pacing yourself doesn't mean you should completely stop an activity.
- Stop before you need to; you shouldn't get to the point you need to stop because your pain or fatigue has increased.
- Try to do a little amount and often.
- Change your position regularly to avoid increased pain through prolonged postures.
- Aim to increase your activity levels gradually over time.

## How to increase your activity levels

- Baselines (see page 9) can be used for most activities you do daily.
- Your baseline should be the same on a good day and bad day.
- Timers can be helpful to remind you when you need to change position especially if you get engrossed in your activity.
- If you feel you are able to increase your baseline gradually increase it by a couple minutes.
- If it doesn't increase your pain levels make this your new baseline.
- Keep the same baseline for at least a week before increasing again.
- Don't increase all activities at the same time.
- Initially it can be frustrating to be constantly 'clock watching' but soon baselines will become routine.

## Goal Setting

### Things to think about when setting goals

- What are you doing right now?
- What small changes can you make right away?
- Be realistic. If you are not very active right now, do not set yourself a goal of walking everywhere by next month.

### Getting started

- What do you want to achieve?  
(Start with something you would enjoy doing).
- Start by setting one goal.
- Choose something that is both realistic and achievable.
- Write it down.

## Be SMART with your goals

Using the SMART rule ensures your goal is realistic and achievable

- S** - Specific: exactly what you want to achieve
- M** - Measurable: how will you know when you can do it?
- A** - Achievable: is this really an achievable goal?
- R** - Realistic: is it relevant to you?
- T** - Timed: give yourself a deadline of when you want to achieve it by

When you have an achievable long term goal you need to break it down into smaller steps. You may need to set a series of short term goals to achieve the long term goal.

Think of what difficulties you may have achieving your goals.

Don't get disheartened if you don't achieve a step as planned. You may have needed to add an extra step to get there.

Don't move on to the next short term goal until you are ready. Increase them slowly.

## **Re-evaluate your goals on a regular basis**

It is helpful to set different goals for different areas of your life, for example:

- Exercise
- Relaxation
- Social activities
- Work (paid/unpaid/housework)
- Pleasurable/leisure activities

Congratulate and reward yourself for all your achievements no matter how big or small!!

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:  
Heather Harrison, Physiotherapy Department,  
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01904 725390.

## **Teaching, training and research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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