

BALANCING EXERCISE AND FATIGUE



Multiple Sclerosis Society
of SA & NT

Why is Exercise Important?

Regular exercise has many benefits including improved fitness, strength, balance and coordination. It can also help improve quality of life, mood, and reduce fatigue.

*“If you don’t use it, you will lose it. Even if you use it badly, it is better than not using it at all.”
(person with MS, regular exerciser)*

Without regular exercise, you can lose your strength and fitness. This is called deconditioning and can add to your MS fatigue levels.

“Before exercising regularly, I was having trouble holding a spoon in the air. Now, I am able to do biceps curls lifting 4kg and have no trouble holding the spoon.” (person with MS, regular exerciser)

Exercise can be walking, playing sport, Tai Chi, swimming, water exercises, yoga, going to an exercise class or everyday activities such as housework or playing with the kids.

*“When you exercise, you don’t seem to notice the benefits, but if you stop, you notice just how much of a difference it makes.”
(person with MS, regular exerciser)*

Managing Fatigue During Exercise

Fatigue affects up to 75% of people with MS and is often reported as the biggest barrier to exercise. Balancing fatigue and exercise is very important to maximise your energy.

Exercise needs to be done in a way which will give you more energy in the long run. When many people start (or return) to exercise, they try to do too much, too soon. This is a common mistake and “overdoing it” often makes people feel more fatigued.

*“If you do everything all at once, you will fail. One step at a time.”
(person with MS, regular exerciser)*

It is important to start slowly, exercise within your limits and gradually build your exercise tolerance. This way you will *improve* your fitness.

“It takes patience - some people think it will happen instantly. It won't, but it will happen if you stick to it.” (person with MS, regular exerciser)

Listening to your body

Listening to your body during the course of the day and during exercise is important. It can tell you how much exercise to do, when you have had enough and what time of day you should exercise.

Some helpful tips are:

- An exercise diary helps you keep track of how much you've done and what effects it has had.
- Try and do a little bit of exercise every day - even when you are tired. A little bit is better than none.
- If you feel yourself getting overheated; stop, take a rest, drink cool water and keep cool.
- Keep fluid levels up when exercising and drink water afterwards. Dehydration can make you feel tired.
- Learn to recognise early signs of fatigue (eg. a change in visual or sensory symptoms) so you can take a break or change your activity.

How much is too much?

It is natural to feel tired during or after exercise. However, if the tiredness takes too long to resolve and limits your other activities, you have done too much.

“Know your limits and work within them.” (person with MS, regular exerciser)

Planning your day

It is important to plan your day – it will make the most of your energy.

- Space out high energy activities with rest and relaxation between tasks.
- Have a weekly routine.
- Plan relaxation time after exercise.
- Plan when the best time for you to do exercise is eg. Morning or afternoon.
- If you are sensitive to heat, it can be helpful to exercise in the coolest part of the day or a cool environment, eg. A cool pool or air conditioned area.
- Prioritise the most important things that need to be done in the day and plan your day around these.
- Make exercise a priority. In the long run it will allow you to have more energy to do other activities.

Recharge

It is important to give your body a chance to rest and recharge after exercise.

- Some people find that after exercise they need to sit down for a few minutes and have a nap, or practice relaxation techniques
- The amount of rest time needed differs from person to person

Keeping Motivated

Starting to exercise is important but is only part of the battle - continuing to exercise regularly is perhaps even more difficult. Here are some ideas to keep motivated:

- Congratulate yourself on what you've done, rather than beating yourself up for what you haven't done.
- Do something you enjoy.
- Join an exercise group or a sporting club. Most people find exercising in groups more fun and it can be a great social opportunity.
- Make regular appointment times to exercise so it becomes part of your routine.
- Keep an exercise diary or mark off days on the calendar

when you've exercised.

- Listen to music while you exercise.
- Set *realistic* short term and long term goals.
- Know that what you are doing is helpful to your body.

More information

For more information or to discuss fatigue management or exercise further please contact the MS Society of SA & NT below.

INFO09 CS MS Balancing Exercise and Fatigue

Last updated December 2010

MS House

110 Reservoir Road, MODBURY
SA 5092

Phone 8396 0044

Fax: (08) 83 96 0184

Website: www.ms.asn.au

Email: info@ms.asn.au