

EXERCISE



Multiple Sclerosis Society
of SA & NT

Everyone benefits from regular exercise, including people with MS. However if you are affected by MS, there is some forms of exercise that can benefit and improve your symptoms.

Exercise is really any activity that involves physical movements with an increase in effort such as shopping, housework, walking and gardening.

Exercise is important to improve not just your physical health but also your emotional health due to the release of 'feel good' hormones when you exercise.

Benefits of fitness

Exercise has many benefits including improving fitness and stamina, maintaining and/or increasing muscle strength, improving balance and coordination and reducing the risk of osteoporosis and heart disease. Osteoporosis is a greater risk for people with MS if you do not get much exercise or sunlight and/or you have taken a course of steroids. Exercise can also help to improve a range of MS

symptoms including balance and coordination difficulties, muscle weakness, spasticity, bladder and bowel problems and fatigue.

It is important so start and maintain regular exercise soon after diagnosis to maximise your physical ability and reduce the level of physical disability in the event of symptoms. Research is suggesting that regular exercise slows the rate of functional limitation.

Contrary to popular opinion exercise does not cause exacerbations.

Unwanted extra weight is an issue for many people with MS and a healthy diet and exercise will help with weight loss.

Exercise time is 'you time' and a stress reliever.

Fitness to fit every lifestyle

There are many ways to enjoy physical activity.

- join a local gym
- personal training either one on one or in a group either indoors or outdoors
- weight training

- wheelchair exercise
- water based exercise - eg swimming, pool aerobics
- Vibragyms
- Yoga, Pilates and Tai chi
- brisk walking and bushwalking
- WiiFit programs
- exercise DVDs
- online and streamed exercise programs
- Zumba and aerobics
- bike riding, exercise bikes and hand cycle machines
- sports eg football, netball

Get the most out of exercising

Aim for 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise every day. This can be broken down into 10 minute sessions. Try to work to your Working Heart Rate (WHR). Establish your maximum heart rate (MHR) using the formula: $220 - \text{age} = \text{MHR}$. Your WHR is 60-80% of your MHR.

This is the level of exercise you need to work at for the assigned time to get the benefits of exercise. As you get fitter you will need to work harder to achieve your WHR.

If you exercise at a lower intensity then exercise will cause less pain, fatigue and strain – so this is ideal if you are unfit or pain and fatigue

are issues for you. If you want to maximise fat loss and fitness then you either have to increase the intensity or exercise longer.

To get the most benefit from exercise, you should exercise at a moderate pace – that's not a stroll, it's a brisk walk or medium paced swimming or cycling.

Exercise tips

- Seek advice from your GP if you are new to exercise or returning after a long break.
- get started
- find something that you enjoy ie don't plan to work out in an exercise class if you don't like to exercise with others.
- exercising with a partner can provide an additional source of motivation and help you stick to a routine
- start small and build up gradually eg walk for 20 minutes 3 – 4 times a week then build up to brisk walking for 30-60 minutes daily.
- exercise at a time when you are at your best eg mornings
- be active every day in every way possible – walk the dog, park further away, take the stairs, do some gardening.
- modify your exercise program

as needed and change your program every 6 weeks because your body adapts to the exercise and you risk boredom. You won't keep losing weight or getting fitter unless you do more, work harder or change your exercise eg if you walk, then change to swimming or cycling.

- make an appointment in your diary for your exercise session and stick to it.
- seek guidance from a fitness professional in a gym.
- set realistic personal goals - goals can help you see tangible benefits of exercise
- keep to your own pace – Remember that getting into the program and going at your own pace is more important than beginning too vigorously, discouraging yourself and dropping out.
- listen to your body – during the workout, pay attention to your body and the signals it is giving you and the effect it may have on your symptoms
- cool down at the end with gentle stretching
- Work out when it's best for you to eat – before or after exercise is different for everybody. Keep

trying until you get it right.

Adapting to MS symptoms

Inform your instructor of any MS symptoms you may have so that you are exercising safely.

Your symptoms may influence the type of exercise that you do, but having MS does not mean that you automatically stop exercising.

You may need to vary your exercise regime, eg if you have visual problems choose an activity such as yoga rather than golf.

Cognitive difficulties might mean you find it harder to follow instructions – so write them down.

Exercise for specific MS symptoms

Fatigue is most likely to affect your ability to exercise. But it does not prevent you from exercising. Keep your body cool before and during exercising to increase the time you can exercise. Drink cool fluids to cool down, exercise in an air conditioned room or outside when there is a cool breeze or early morning. Exercise in a cool pool. Improving your cardiovascular fitness through vigorous exercise combats fatigue and raises your fatigue threshold. Find the balance between rest and physical activity because if you rest too

much then you become deconditioned and more susceptible to fatigue. Gentler forms of exercise should also be tried like yoga, Pilates and walking. Refer to the Fatigue series for more information. Regular aerobic exercise including jogging has been shown to help reduce **depression/low moods** as have tai chi and yoga. Exercising is a good opportunity to meet new people who have a healthy lifestyle. The use of aids can help **balance problems, co-ordination and spasticity** – try aids like walking poles, indoor bikes and rowers. Yoga, Pilates and Tai chi that concentrate on breath control, stretching and balance may help. **Bladder weakness** can be helped with pelvic floor exercises and aerobic exercise can benefit **bowel problems**.

How to fit exercise into your lifestyle

Exercise will be most effective if it is part of your regular lifestyle. You will have the most success if you enjoy the activity, the company (or the solitude), do it at a time that is best for you, see the outcomes, can manage the cost (consider free activities like

jogging, walking) and you don't have to travel far.

When you can't exercise

There may be times when you feel you can't exercise or when it would be wise to do less than usual. If you take a break, it doesn't need to be permanent – when life settles back down then restart your exercise regime.

Exercise for people severely affected by MS

If you are more severely affected by MS you may need to talk to a physiotherapist to design and customise an exercise program. Stretching and range of motion exercises can be most helpful. Your family and friends may be able to help with these exercises in between physiotherapy sessions.

The importance of stretching

Stretching is useful for everyone because it reduces muscle stiffness and soreness from exercising. It reduces muscle wasting from lack of use and is particularly important for people who are more severely affected by MS. Stretching can help with controlling spasms/cramps and associated pain.

Guidelines for stretching

- stretches must be done just after warm-up and cool down.
- **hold** the stretches for 20-30 seconds and repeat a few times.
- never push to point of feeling pain. You should feel a light stretch.

- never bounce! This can cause tiny tears in your muscles and make them stiff and sore. It may also encourage spasms.

Benefits of physiotherapy

A physiotherapist can help to design, supervise and revise a well balanced program for you.

If you are interested in more information:

The Society has more information sheets included in the Healthy Living Series as well as a Managing MS and Symptoms series and a Keep Active Information Sheet. Please see the website for more details.

References

Fitness Australia

Exercise guidelines cardiovascular exercise guidelines

http://www.fitness.org.au/fitness_australia_cardiovascular_exercise_prescription_for_healthy_adults.pdf

MS Society Australia

Strength and cardiorespiratory exercise for people with MS

<http://www.mssociety.org.au/documents/MS-Practice/strength.pdf>

MS Active Source

http://www.msactivesource.com/msasProject/msas.portal/baseurl/threeCollLayout/MASRepository/en_US/msas/home/wellness/multiple-sclerosis-exercise-and-fitness/index.xml

MS Society Canada

<http://mssociety.ca/gc/pdf/services/MS%20and%20Fitness.pdf>

MS Trust (UK)

Exercises for people with MS <http://www.mstrust.org.uk/information/exercises/>

http://www.mssociety.org.uk/about_ms/everyday_living/exercise_and_physiotherapy/index.html

Ms Essentials 21 Exercise and physiotherapy

http://www.mssociety.org.uk/downloads/MS_Essentials_21_Exercise_and_physiotherapy_0111_-_web.aa71c4f1.pdf

MS Society (US)

Momentum Fall 09 Healthy Living What research says about exercise for people with MS <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/multimedia-library/momentum-magazine/back-issues/momentum-fall-2009/index.aspx>

INFO34 CS Healthy Living – Exercise

Last Updated 28 March 2011

MS House, 110 Reservoir Road, MODBURY SA 5092

Phone 8396 0044

Fax: (08) 83 96 0184

Toll Free: 1800 812 311

Email ms@ms.asn.au

Website www.ms.asn.au