

CHOOSE



EXERCISE

Most people with MS, regardless of their degree of disability, can benefit from some exercise. Many have some degree of ability. The right kind of exercise can bring positive physical and psychological health benefits.

Exercise helps you do the things you want to do and helps to prevent complications that can result from inactivity. It can improve flexibility, fitness, strength and stamina, circulation, muscle tone and mood. It can also help with the stimulation of fluids and excretion of waste products.

Many people with MS think they cannot do any exercise because they will become too fatigued but the strange fact is that it can actually give you energy rather than take it away from you – as long as you exercise sensibly and know your levels of ability. It is important to balance the exercise with rest. You may wish to only undertake short sessions so you can avoid overheating. Remember, over-exercise can lead to weakness, fatigue, pain and spasticity. Therefore it is sometimes better to build up your exercises slowly.

Even if you are quite inactive, simple exercises like calf muscle lifts and stretches can be done at home on a daily basis. Passive exercisers are useful and there are many good products on the market which can be used sitting down. If you suffer with spasticity a Physiotherapist can do assisted movements with you.

Good Forms of Exercise:

Physiotherapy

It is quite important to see a neurologically-trained Physiotherapist as early on as possible. MS patients are often referred too late. Your G.P. or Neurologist should supply a referral. You can also receive Physio at one of the many MS Therapy Centres around the country, where the number of sessions are not rationed.

If you suffer with spasticity a Physiotherapist can do assisted movements with you and also help you to stand and balance properly, stand up from sitting and lying, walk better, position yourself to sleep, co-ordinate your movements better and help with posture etc.

It is a good idea to speak with your Physio if you are thinking of undertaking any of the under mentioned therapies and also ask their advice on any exercise machines available.

Swimming

Swimming is especially helpful because your bodyweight is supported by the water – the water will help to stabilize someone with balance problems. Weakened muscles can operate in this environment and will strengthen from the resistance. As swimming involves many muscles in your body, it can help to increase co-ordination. There are now many

more swimming pools and leisure centres having special sessions for people with disabilities or those who require special help and it may be worth trying one of these sessions first.

As a precaution it is best to ascertain the temperature of the water beforehand as many people with MS find water that is too hot or too cold a problem. The most comfortable temperature is about 30°C (86°F).

Pilates

Pilates *is* a type of exercise programme based on correct body alignment. The focus is on co-ordination, moving properly and "core strength". Good breathing patterns are important also. As a holistic method of body maintenance, it prioritizes general fitness and body awareness, which contributes positively to rehabilitation.

In MS, Pilates can improve posture, boost the immune system, reduce stress, increase energy and bone density, improve circulation and respiration, improve muscle tone and balance.

T'ai Chi

T'ai Chi is meditation with movement. It concentrates on relaxation and correct breathing while performing graceful, circular, flowing exercises, sometimes to music. It is especially helpful for people with MS who no longer have the stamina to exercise at a high speed and another advantage is that you can exercise without overheating.

Really you need to be able to stand to be able to cope with all the range of moves. However, it is possible, according to the teacher, to do some of the moves sitting down, e.g. the arm movements and breathing exercises.

T'ai Chi can help in MS by improving balance, combating fatigue and giving you more energy. It can also help with spasms, exercises muscles and is very relaxing. Regular practice can also help with depression and maintain a calm and more serene inner state. T'ai Chi is a good method of self-development, focusing the mind and giving people with MS a sense of well being.

Yoga

Yoga is widely used by many people with MS and there are now specialist centres and teachers. It is a unity of mind and body and is as much about your breathing and your outlook on life as it is about postures. It can calm the mind and energise the body as well as helping to counteract stress, fatigue and depression.

It has a good effect on the endocrine glands, circulatory and respiratory systems and improves wellbeing. Yoga also tones the digestive organs and other glands in the body such as the thyroid and adrenals.

The main concern with yoga and MS is that you should work well within your limitations in a relaxed way and be careful not to push yourself too far or raise your body temperature, as this may increase fatigue.