

Let's get MOVING



Thanks to GP referral schemes and special exercise classes there's never been a better time to get physical, says Martin Feaver

We all know we should be as physically active as we can. The problem is that it's harder for some than it is for others. As we grow older, our bodies can develop one or more medical conditions which means moving can be a painful and, sometimes, even a scary business. In turn, we tend to avoid doing things and our range of daily activities can become reduced – often surprisingly quickly. A vicious circle of inactivity begins that becomes hard to break. Like the old expression says: "If you don't use it, you lose it!"

It's a difficult position. You know you should move around and yet you find yourself in pain or worried that you could even make your condition worse. Although you should always seek qualified medical advice before undertaking any sort of exercise, the good news is that there are few medical conditions where being physically active is forbidden totally



MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

- Reduces depression and increases mood elevation
- Improved sense of control and self confidence in specific situations
- Improved sense of well-being
- Improved self belief in one's abilities
- Increased self-efficacy

– many doctors actually recommend being active as part of your treatment.

The reason for this is simple. Our bodies are designed to move – they actually thrive on being used. Sitting for long periods of time at a desk or watching afternoon TV does us few favours. We all know the feeling of having sat for too long and when we get up to make a cup of tea, our back is stiff and our legs are reluctant to carry us. Not only that, we may also feel sluggish and weary, even though we haven't really done anything.

Without physical activity, our bodies decline. But with it, they grow strong and become rejuvenated. And it is not just our bodies either. Possibly one of the greatest effects of physical activity is on the mind. All of us hold a perception of our ability to undertake activities – it is called 'body consciousness'. This belief stems from what we think we can do rather than what we can actually do. It's affected by our mood, level of self confidence, past experiences and general health. Being physically active improves our mood, self confidence and 'body consciousness'. We start to believe that we *can* rather than we cannot.

PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

- Strengthens muscles and bones
- Strengthens the heart
- Improves lubrication and nutrition of the joints
- Controls and manages body weight
- Increases energy
- Improves sleep patterns
- Boosts the immune system
- Eliminates toxins from the body and improves digestion
- Improves posture
- Improves flexibility and range of movement
- Improves overall quality of life
- Reduction in blood pressure
- Reduced arthritic pain
- Decreased lower back pain

Breaking the circle is the problem. Once you have obtained medical clearance to exercise what can you actually do? Start gradually. Think of what you can do today as being a box. Tomorrow try and expand that box by doing something that requires more effort than it did today. Bending an arthritic knee a few times or dusting the dressing table will be a major achievement for some, others will need to be more adventurous and start a walking or swimming programme. Small steps are still steps in the right direction.

If exercising on land fills you with a dread of pain, you could try your local swimming pool. Water provides extra support for the body, reducing the load damaged joints have to carry. Exercise that usually results in pain on land is often pain-free in water. Check to see if there is a hydrotherapy pool locally that you can use.

If you decide to exercise in water, talk to swimming pool staff about your needs. Discuss the time you want to exercise and if organised classes are suitable for you. Also ask if there are classes for adults with mobility problems and whether you can have assistance getting to and from the poolside – many pools also have pool lifts

Exercise that results in pain on land is often pain-free in the water

to get you into the water. Finally, check the temperature of the water. Cold water and joint problems do not mix!

Another solution is to seek professional exercise advice about your particular medical condition. The medical profession and the health and fitness industry have begun to work more closely on exercise programmes for specific conditions. This has led to links between GP surgeries and local leisure centres, with the introduction of GP referral schemes. Patients can attend exercise classes with specially trained leisure centre staff. Medical conditions catered for include osteo-arthritis, diabetes, obesity, heart disease and depression.

For those who find standing to exercise difficult, there are often exercise classes

that are chair-based. These classes enable participants to sit as they exercise and use the chair for support when, or if, they need to stand. GP referral schemes are often quite heavily subsidised – your GP's surgery should have details.

Another way forward is to contact an organisation that works with your particular medical condition. These groups, such as the Parkinson's Disease Society and the National Osteoporosis Society, often have information packs about exercising and usually have a helpline. Many also run support groups. And don't dismiss your local community hall exercise programme, either. Many fitness professionals take qualifications that include working with specific conditions such as falls prevention or the disabled. Call the instructor and clarify if they can help you or check their qualifications on the government-backed Register of Exercise Professionals.

Whatever course of action you take, remember that movement rejuvenates.

SOME USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

National Osteoporosis Society

Camerton
Bath
BA2 0PJ
Osteoporosis Helpline:
0845 4500230
Email inquiries:
nurses@nos.org.uk
Go online:
www.nos.org.uk

Diabetes UK

Macleod House,
10 Parkway
London
NW1 7AA
Caroline: 0845
1202960
Email inquiries:
info@diabetes.org.uk
Go online:
www.diabetes.org.uk

Helplines:

Arthritis Care

18 Stephenson Way
London NW1 2HD
Helpline: 0808 800
4050 (from 12pm to
4pm Monday to
Friday) or
020 7380 6555
(from 10am to 4pm
standard call charges)
Email inquiries:
helplines@arthritis
care.org.uk
Go online:
www.arthritiscare.
org.uk

**Extend: Movement
to Music for the
Over Sixties and
Less Able People**
2 Place Farm

Wheathampstead
Hertfordshire
AL4 8SB

Tel: 01582 832760
Email inquiries:
admin@extend.org.uk
Go online:
www.extend.org.uk

The Stroke Association

Stroke Information
Service
240 City Road
London
EC1V 2PR
Helpline: 0845 3033
100 (open 9am to 5pm
Monday to Friday)
E-mail inquiries:
info@stroke.org.uk
Go online:
www.stroke.org.uk

British Lung Foundation

73-75 Goswell Road
London EC1V 7ER
Helpline:
08458 50 50 20
Go online:
www.britishlung
foundation.com

Register of Exercise Professionals

8-10 Crown Hill
Croydon
Surrey
CR0 1RZ
Tel: 020 8686 6464
Email inquiries: info@
exerciseregister.org
Go online: www.
exerciseregister.org