

Physical Activity for People With Limited Mobility



Prevention and Health Education Unit
Prepared by Licensed Health Educators

Objectives

Describe the benefits of physical activity for people with limited mobility.


Identify safe and accessible physical activity options.

Offer practical recommendations to support regular physical activity.

Physical activity

- In general terms, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines physical activity as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure.

Physical Activity

- Staying active is critical to your health.
 - You don't need full mobility to benefit from physical activity. If you have a disability or limited mobility, it's important to move in ways that are safe and realistic for your abilities.
 - Physical activity in this context isn't about meeting traditional athletic goals, but about finding adapted and creative ways to strengthen the body, improve circulation, and boost mood.
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Benefits of Physical Activity



Improves mental health and energy levels

Develops strength, endurance, and flexibility to support independence in daily tasks

Keeps the heart healthy and reduces the risk of chronic diseases

Helps maintain a healthy body weight

Maintains bone density

Supports socialization and connection with others



Communicating Well With Your Doctor

Your doctor or physical therapist will help you find an appropriate exercise routine. You can ask the following questions:

How much exercise should I do during the week?

What kind of exercises can I do?

What exercises or activities should I avoid?

Should I use any medications before, during, or after the exercise routine?



Getting started

- Starting gradually is key.
- You can begin with 10 minutes of activity and little by little increase as your capacity improves. At first, you may not be able to do 10 minutes at once. If that happens, do what feels comfortable and build up little by little.
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Reminder

- It's important to remember that any type of exercise offers health benefits. When you have mobility issues, it's inevitable that some activities will be easier than others. The goal should be to incorporate three different types of exercise into your routine.

Examples of exercises

Isometric exercises



If you experience joint problems from arthritis or an injury, your health care provider may recommend isometric exercises to help maintain muscle strength and prevent muscle deterioration. Isometric exercises involve applying force without moving the body.

Electrical Muscle Stimulation



If you experience muscle loss from an injury or disability, electrical muscle stimulation may help increase blood flow and improve the muscle's range of motion.

The muscles contract slightly because of an electrical current transmitted through electrodes placed on the skin.

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Strength Training



Many traditional upper-body exercises can be performed from a seated position using dumbbells, resistance bands, or any weighted object that fits comfortably in your hand.

Strength Training



Perform exercises such as shoulder presses, bicep curls, and triceps extensions using heavier weight and greater resistance than you would during cardio-focused movements.

Try to complete two or three sets of 8 to 12 repetitions for each exercise, increasing the weight and adding new movements as your strength improves.

Resistance bands can be attached to a piece of furniture, a doorknob, or your chair, and used for pulling and pushing exercises, shoulder rotations, and arm and leg extensions.

Cardio Workouts in a Chair or Wheelchair

Chair aerobics, which involve repetitive seated movements, can raise your heart rate and help you burn calories. Many strength-training exercises performed at a faster pace with higher repetitions offer similar benefits. In fact, any quick, repetitive movement can provide aerobic effects and help loosen stiff joints.



Cardiovascular Exercise in a Chair or Wheelchair

Run a low-resistance band under your chair, bed, or couch and perform quick resistance movements, such as chest presses, using a one-second lift and a two-second return. Aim for 20 to 30 repetitions per exercise, try several different movements to get started, and gradually increase the number of exercises, reps, and total workout time as your endurance improves.

- Punching the air, whether or not you wear wrist weights, is an easy cardio exercise that can be done while sitting.

Aquatic therapy is an excellent option.

Flexibility Exercises

If you're in a wheelchair or your legs are immobile, stretching throughout the day can help reduce the muscle pain and pressure that often come from sitting for long periods.

Stretching while lying down or practicing yoga or tai chi in a chair can also help improve flexibility and increase your range of motion.



Chair-Based Yoga and Tai Chi

Most yoga and tai chi poses can be adapted to match your level of physical mobility. These practices are especially helpful if you have disabilities, injuries, or medical conditions, as they support improved flexibility, strength, and relaxation.



IMPORTANT

- **Stop exercising** if you experience pain, discomfort, nausea, dizziness, lightheadedness, chest pain, an irregular heartbeat, shortness of breath, or sweaty hands. Listening to your body is one of the most effective ways to prevent injury.
- **Avoid activities** that involve an injured body part.
- **Perform warm-up**, stretching, and cool-down to prepare your body and support recovery.
- **Drink plenty of water**; your body functions best when properly hydrated.
- **Wear appropriate clothing**, including athletic shoes and comfortable garments that do not restrict movement.

EMOTIONAL BARRIERS


In addition to the physical challenges you may face, you might also encounter emotional barriers that make exercising feel difficult. These recommendations can help:

- **Focus on the possible:** Avoid comparing yourself to conventional standards. Celebrate every small movement and every bit of progress as a personal victory.
- **Seek support:** Exercising with someone else who also has limited mobility can boost motivation and reduce feelings of isolation.

Questions or Comments



References

- <https://www.tmh.org/blogs/5-limited-mobility-exercises-you-can-perform-home>
 - <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/active-limited-mobility.aspx>
 - <https://www.helpguide.org/es/envejecimiento-saludable/como-ejercitarse-si-su-movilidad-es-limitada>
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Social and Emotional Aspect

For recommendations, tools, and resources on how you and your family can cope with the emotional and physical concerns that arise during and after any medical treatment, please visit your primary care physician or contact the following phone lines:

Available Service Lines

Medical Advice Line

24 hours a day/ 7 days a week

1-844-347-7801

TTY/TDD 1-844-347-7804

Customer Service

1-844-347-7800

TTY/TDD 1-844-347-7805

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