Getting back on your feet!

This leaflet is designed to help “get you back on your feet”. It is aimed at anyone who has a long-term condition, has been in hospital for a long period of time, or who is generally feeling weak and less mobile following a period of illness.

If you have been in hospital, your Physiotherapist on the ward will discuss options for further Physiotherapy input with you, if appropriate, before you leave the hospital.

Throughout this leaflet you will find hints and tips to help you make the most of the energy you have, as well as some exercises to build strength and stamina. It may be that not all the tips are practical for you, but it is important to find the ones that work for you and for you to follow these. They can also be used alongside other coping strategies that you may have already developed yourself.

When we are unwell our bodies need time to recover and this happens in two stages: fighting the initial illness and then building back up to some form of normality. Fighting an illness uses a lot of energy and it is natural for it to take some time to fully recover afterwards. Unfortunately, it takes longer to recover overall strength and stamina than it does to lose it!

Energy conservation

Here are some tips to help you conserve energy and in turn gradually build up strength and overall stamina:

- Exercise little and often

- Take regular, short breaks and pace yourself when doing functional activities
  - maximal effort may lead to burnout and prolonged periods of inactivity while you recover
  - working to 70% effort (you have some energy remaining but are starting to tire) will allow you to achieve more in one day
• Eat regular, small meals is more beneficial, as eating large meals uses more energy both for eating and digesting the food
  ➢ helps keep sugar levels constant so that you don’t have periods of very high and then very low energy

• Plan and prioritise activities for the day/week
  ➢ Can someone else help you with the activity?
  ➢ Do all the activities have to be done today?
  ➢ Is there an alternative way to carry out an activity?
    ➢ eg online shopping
    ➢ getting a lift with someone rather than taking the bus
    ➢ using equipment such as long-handled shoe horns to limit bending
    ➢ sitting down to peel vegetables, to dry up or have a wash
    ➢ consider using a shopping trolley on wheels rather than carrying bags

• Place commonly used items at waist height, avoid excessive bending down or reaching up high

• It is not a failure to ask for help!
  ➢ it will help you remain more independent in the long run
  ➢ it will allow you to enjoy more activities

• Social interaction is tiring, but important for keeping your mood levels up
  ➢ plan it into your activities, but make sure you don’t overdo it!

Exercise

Here are some exercises that can help you to build strength and increase your exercise tolerance. They are aimed at some of the bigger muscle groups in the body. When weak, these muscles use a lot of energy to do even basic tasks and therefore will tire quickly. By strengthening them it reduces the amount of energy needed for basic tasks thus allowing you to gradually do and achieve more.

Try to do some exercise daily, build up the time and intensity gradually. Try and go for a short walk most days, as well as doing some of the strength specific exercises.

Only do the exercises that you feel comfortable to do. It is better to start with a smaller number of repetitions and build them up gradually. You can start with
seated exercises and work up to standing, or do a mixture but keeping it at a lower level to start with.

You will know if you are working at the right level as on completing an exercise you should just be able to feel the muscle or joint that you have worked, it should not be agony or cause distress. Stop exercising and rest (even if you haven’t done the whole program) if you feel you have reached the 70% exertion limit, as described above.

It is normal to feel some stiffness and achiness for a couple of days after starting to exercise. Remember to keep yourself moving and still try to do some exercise each day as this will help reduce the stiffness. If, however, you are unable to move the next day it is likely you have done too much and you may need a day to recover before starting again at a lower intensity level.

1 Seated hip flexion

Sitting in a chair with back support, slowly lift your knees towards the ceiling.
Try NOT to push through your arms.
Repeat 5 - 20 times with each leg.
This exercise can be progressed into standing when you feel able.

2 Leg extension

Sitting in a chair with support.
Slowly straighten out one leg from the knee, hold this for 5 - 10 seconds.
Repeat with the other leg.
Repeat the above 5 - 10 times with each leg.

3 Static quads

Sitting up in bed with your back well supported.
Push one knee down into the bed as if you are trying to squeeze water out of a sponge below your knee.
Hold for 10 seconds.
Repeat 5 – 10 times with both legs.
4 Straight leg raise

Complete this exercise either in the same position as exercise 3 or lying on your back as you feel comfortable.

Push your knee into the bed as for exercise 3 and then gently lift the leg whilst keeping it straight approximately 5cm off the bed.

Aim to hold for 5 – 10 seconds.

Repeat 5 – 10 times with both legs.

5 Bridging

Lying on your back, head raised as comfortable.

Bend both knees up so your feet are flat on the bed or floor (depending on where you choose to lay).

Push through your feet and at the same time squeeze your bottom cheeks together. This should then lift your bottom slightly off the bed.

Pause briefly and then slowly lower your bottom back on to the bed.

Repeat 5 – 15 times

6 Mini squats

Stand holding onto something secure.

Slowly bend your knees forward over your toes and slowly return to standing.

Repeat 5 -10 times.

You can make the exercise harder by holding the knee bend before returning to standing.
7 Shoulder flexion

Sitting or standing.

Keeping your arms straight slowly lift them to shoulder height and then return to the start position.

Repeat 5 – 10 times.

You can make the exercise harder by holding your arms at shoulder height for a few seconds before lowering them or by adding small weights.

You can do one arm at a time or both together.

8 Elbow flexion

In a standing or sitting position.

Slowly bend your elbows up and slowly lower. You can do one arm at a time or both together but it is important that the exercise is completed slowly.

Repeat 5 – 10 times.

You can make the exercise harder by adding a small weight or increasing the number of repetitions.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo) https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust

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