

# Patient information

## Getting you back on your feet!

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

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 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!

### Importance of staying active

Symptoms such as breathlessness, fatigue and muscle weakness are very common after a period of illness, and can contribute to feelings of anxiety relating to being active.

This can lead to a cycle of inactivity:

Being active can help you to:

- Breathe more efficiently



Putting you first

- Improve your muscle strength
- Improve your fitness levels and your tolerance to exercise
- Improve your mood and emotional well-being
- Improve your overall quality of life

## How do I know if I am working at the right intensity level?

Breathlessness is a normal part of exerting ourselves. When we become more active, our muscles demand more oxygen from our lungs. This is achieved by:

- Increased breathing rate
- Larger breaths
- Increased accessory muscle work (the muscles in your neck, upper chest and rib cage)
- Increased movement in your upper chest

It can sometimes be difficult to know how hard you should push yourself during physical activity. The BORG Breathlessness Scale is a useful guide (see next page).

### You should aim to be working at level 3 - 4.

Remember this will be personal to you and may differ from somebody else's idea of level 3 - 4.

You should also be able to feel that your muscles have worked but this should not cause agony or distress.

## BORG Breathlessness Scale

Level	Description
0	<b>Nothing at all</b> (no breathlessness at all)
0.5	<b>Just noticeable</b> (slightly breathless, but I can do this all day)
1	<b>Very slight</b> (still more than comfortable, but breathing a little harder now)
2	<b>Slight</b> (feeling good, getting a little warm, but I can hold a conversation)
3	<b>Moderate</b> (beginning to feel you're working)
4	<b>Somewhat difficult</b> (I'm just above comfortable. A bit puffed/sweaty, but still able to hold a conversation)
5	<b>Difficult</b> (I can still talk, but I am definitely breathless and definitely hot and sweaty)

6	<b>Moderately Severe</b> (I can still talk, but I don't really want to. I am feeling very pushed)
7	<b>Severe</b> (very breathless and struggling to keep going)
8	<b>Very severe</b> (I can grunt more than talk. I can't keep up this pace for long)
9	<b>Very, very severe</b> (struggling to get my breath. Unable to talk. Need to stop soon!)
10	<b>Maximal effort</b> (I can't go any further! Ready to stop/pass out!)

## What exercises can I do?

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 the standing or do a mixture but keeping it at a lower level to start with.

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 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.



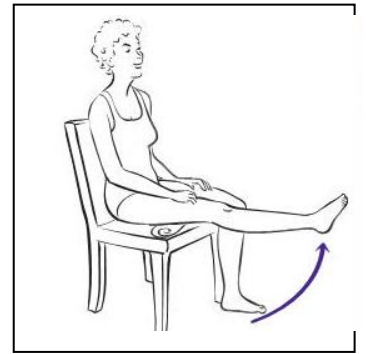
## 2 Leg extension

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.



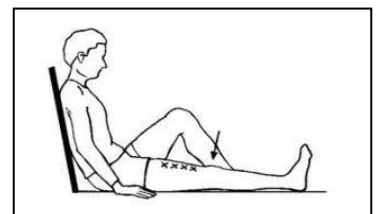
## 3 Static quads

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.



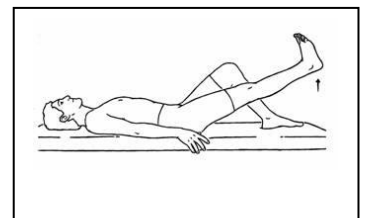
## 4 Straight leg raise

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 5 cm off the bed.

Aim to hold for 5 – 10 seconds.

Repeat 5 – 10 times with both legs.

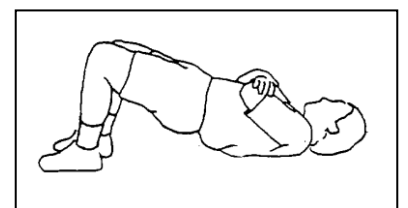


## 5 Bridging

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.

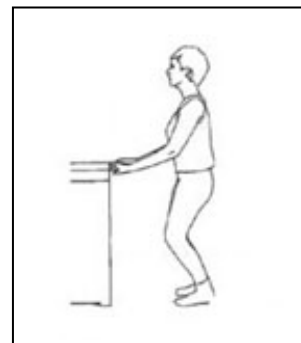
## 6 Mini squats

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.



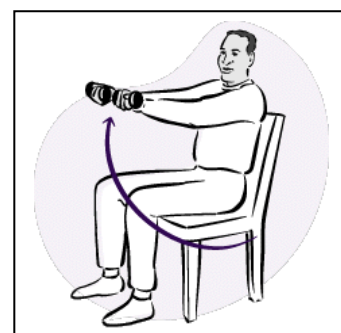
## 7 Shoulder flexion

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.

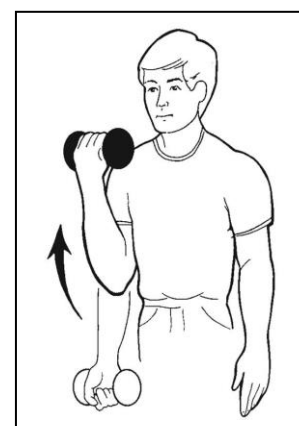
## 8 Elbow flexion

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.



## Energy conservation

It is important to conserve energy where you can, particularly when you first return home, before gradually building up your strength and overall stamina. Here are some tips you help you do this:

- Exercise little and often
- Take regular short breaks and pace yourself when doing functional activities
  - ◇ maximum effort may lead to burnout and prolonged periods of inactivity while you recover
  - ◇ working to 70% effort (you have some energy remaining but starting to tire) will allow you to achieve more in one day
- Eating regular small meals is more beneficial, as eating large meals uses more energy both for eating and digesting food
  - ◇ helps keep sugar levels constant so 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 on-line 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
- Socialising is tiring but important for keeping your mood levels up
  - ◇ plan it into your activities but make sure you don't over do it!

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