

**MS** Society



**Moving more  
with MS**

We're the MS Society. Our community is here for you through the highs, lows and everything in between. We understand what life's like with MS.

Together, we are strong enough to stop MS.

We rely on the generosity of people like you to fund our vital work. If you would like to make a donation, you can do so by:

- Calling us on: **0300 500 8084**.  
Lines are open Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm
- Visiting us at: **[mssociety.org.uk/donate](https://mssociety.org.uk/donate)**
- Posting your donation to: MS Society, National Centre, 372 Edgware Road, London NW2 6ND. Please make cheques payable to the 'MS Society.'

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# A word from Kerstin, who has MS

I was diagnosed in 1994 with relapsing remitting MS.

I was 11 when I started playing hockey, and at 17 I started playing for the German national team.

During one of our matches a few years later, I experienced unusual cramping in one of my legs. It kept returning, and more frequently.

The GP couldn't find anything unusual, so I was referred to hospital. An MRI scan showed I had lesions. A lumbar puncture followed, confirming I had MS. I was 23 at that time.

The medical experts advised me to stop exercising. They couldn't have been more wrong! We didn't know that back then, though.

We now know that it's important to stay active, no matter how severe your condition.

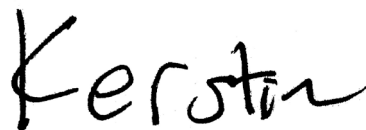
There was a time when I couldn't walk or get out of bed. Thanks to physiotherapy I learnt how to walk again.

Now I do pilates up to four times a week, and I do a lot of walking. I call these activities my legal drugs - they fill me up with endorphins and make me feel good.

I track my heart rate, weight and exercise activity with a special watch. That way I have an overview of what I'm doing, and if it's effective.

Even though I enjoy my junk food and love a glass of wine, overall I try to live a healthy lifestyle. I cook, together with my husband, most nights of the week.

I think it's best to stay positive and focus on what you can do instead of what you can't do. I have MS, but MS doesn't have me!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kerstin". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large 'K' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'n'.

# Five things to know

- 1 Getting and keeping active helps your body and mind to stay as healthy as possible
- 2 Choose an activity you enjoy doing, which will help you stick to your routine
- 3 The right exercise or activity can make a difference to managing and living with your MS. A physiotherapist can help you find the right exercise for you
- 4 An occupational therapist can help you if you're having problems with everyday activities. Speak to your GP for advice and a referral
- 5 Keeping track of your exercise and activities lets you see and manage how you're coming along. Set goals and join a support group. Try using an app or activity tracker to help you with this



# About this booklet

Everyone benefits from being active, including people with MS. No matter how your MS affects you, there are exercises that can help you stay as healthy and active as possible. They can improve your symptoms and how they make you feel.

It's not always easy to find the time, but regular activity or exercise will keep your body working at its best. To make it easier, it's important to find exercise or an activity that suits you – something you enjoy and find worthwhile. MS affects each person differently and you'll have your own likes and dislikes.

You might enjoy sports, while someone else may prefer tai chi or yoga. All kinds of movement can be good for you. Even while gardening, cleaning and walking the kids to school you

use your muscles, and it helps you to stay active.

Physiotherapy can also be very useful. Physiotherapists can help you find exercises to meet your specific needs and abilities. They may suggest exercises that focus on a particular area of your body that you wish to improve, or help you manage a specific effect of your MS.

No matter how MS affects you, the right activity can make a difference to managing and living with your condition.

**“I try to have a walk everyday. I've improved from only being able to walk from home to the first lampost and back, to managing to go around the local green. Even that small increase in distance feels great to me.”**

**Chris**

# Why should I stay active?

It's not only exercise that helps you get active and keep active. Activities like walking, gardening or even housework can help your body and mind stay as healthy as possible.

This is true for people with MS who have milder symptoms, and for those whose MS is more severe. And there's no **evidence** that exercise makes MS worse in the long term, or that exercising causes relapses.

## Avoiding the knock-on effects of MS

### Loss of muscle strength and fitness

**Deconditioning** happens when a muscle isn't used for a long time and loses strength and may be painful. This could make any of your mobility or strength problems worse. These problems are symptoms of MS, so they can't always be avoided. But by finding the right exercises for

you, perhaps with the help of a physiotherapist, you can stop problems getting worse.

### Weight gain or loss

It's important to keep a healthy weight. But many people with MS see their weight change. Exercise can help you control your weight, especially when combined with a healthy, well-balanced diet. Ask your GP to refer you to a dietician to help with any weight issues you might have.

**“Doing exercises every day is important. I do a simple balance exercise every day. Just spend two to three minutes looking up and down and over each shoulder.**

**I've been doing this every morning for six months. Slowly but steadily my balance has improved and I feel more confident moving around.”**

**Patrick**



## Fact

Research tells us that exercise:

- improves the overall health of people with milder MS
- helps people with more severe MS to stay as mobile and active as possible
- improves walking mobility in people with MS
- reduces disease activity in children with MS
- helps some people manage their MS symptoms
- decreases the risk of heart disease and improves mood

### Osteoporosis

Weakened bones, and osteoporosis, may put you at risk if you don't get much exercise or have taken long courses of steroids. Gentle activity strengthens bones and can help prevent these problems developing.

For example, if you regularly use a wheelchair, a **physiotherapist**

may suggest you stand for a few minutes at regular intervals through the day, perhaps supported by a frame for balance. This is known as weight-bearing exercise and can help prevent **osteoporosis**. There are also exercises that can be done sitting down that can help. Ask your physiotherapist which exercises are right for you.

# What sort of activity should I be doing?

There's not any one activity that could be called an 'MS exercise'. MS affects people in different ways, so what works for you might not work for someone else.

What you want from an exercise or activity plan might change over time. Whatever exercise or activity you choose, don't do more than feels right for you.

The exercises listed below help your body keep active in different ways.

- **Resistance or strengthening exercises** include lifting and moving small weights, or using your body's own weight to strengthen muscles and bones. If you have tremor or spasms, pulling against an elastic exercise band might be easier than using weights. If you're home and don't have any gym equipment, perhaps you'd

like to try lifting (carefully!) everyday objects such as a bottle filled with water for weight or sand.

- **Aerobic exercises** such as cycling, running or rowing, make you use different groups of muscles and work your heart and lungs. Exercises that work just the arms or just the legs can also be helpful. This is sometimes known as 'cardiovascular' exercise.

The key to aerobic exercise is to stick to a moderate level of activity for a reasonable length of time (at least 20 minutes, if possible). Whatever you can do, exercise at any level is better than none.

- **Stretching** helps keep muscles supple and relaxed. It's important to stretch before and after resistance or aerobic exercises.



Stretching can also be a useful form of exercise on its own. Try reaching up to high shelving at home or try to bend forward and touch your toes.

- **Range-of-motion exercise** is often used together with stretching. It's about moving your joints so that they go through as full a range of movement as possible. For example, moving the arms, legs, wrists and ankles in wide circles. Try lying on your back while holding left hand to left knee and right hand to right knee and pushing them clockwise and anticlockwise to loosen up your hip joints.
- **Passive stretching** can help where MS has made it hard for you to control particular muscles, or has restricted the use of an arm or leg. With passive stretching a physiotherapist or carer helps you move your arms or legs to create a stretch and move your joints.

- **Posture exercises** help keep your feet, knees, pelvis, shoulders and head aligned to make sure there's less strain on your muscles and bones. This could involve strengthening muscles around the back, chest and stomach areas. This gives support to your body and helps with balance and position when standing up and sitting down.
- **Water-based exercise.** Water can be a good environment for many exercises – not only swimming. Aquarobics (water aerobics) classes are offered at lots of sports centres. Water supports your body and reduces your risk of falls, and there's also less stress placed on your joints and muscles.

Strengthening, stretching and aerobic exercise can be done in a pool. Tailor activities to your own needs.

Some people who are sensitive to heat also find it good to exercise in cool water. Others may even find that a warm pool is good for them.



As with any exercise, you need to find the right environment for you. Some local pools offer a 'warm water day' each week and have special sessions for people with disabilities.

Sports, activities and physiotherapy can all provide a good balance of these different types of exercise.

If your situation changes, you might want to try a new sport, adjust what you do already, or work with a physiotherapist to discover specific exercises that could benefit you. No matter what your ability is, there's a huge range of sports and activities available to you.

For information about complementary therapies such as tai chi, pilates and yoga, see our booklet on 'Complementary and alternative medicine (CAMs)'.

Exercising doesn't have to mean playing a sport. You can get exercise simply by being active. Walking, gardening, dancing,

boccia, and playing with pets can all provide exercise.

Just like the different sports available, these kinds of activities vary in the type of 'work out' that they provide. Combined with sports or a programme of physiotherapy exercises, they can be helpful in keeping active.

If you can't, or don't want to, join a gym or exercise outside, there are a number of online exercise websites which offer downloadable and streamed workouts for you to do at your own pace.

There are a number of MS-specific exercise DVDs that have routines you can follow at home. See on page 42 for more information.

There are also a number of virtual reality computer games which can be played at home and can help you keep moving, for example Wii Fit.



Controlled  
ZONE

## Yoga

A recent university study found that women with moderate symptoms of multiple sclerosis experienced improvements in balance, walking, coordination and quality of life after eight weeks of yoga.

If you have MS, you can contact your local MS Society group to find a class, teacher, or video based on your location and symptoms.

Before starting yoga, consult your GP and/or your physiotherapist. Start with easy poses and slowly try more challenging ones. You can try seated versions from a wheelchair or a firm chair with a solid back. Ask for help when you're unable to move through a yoga pose on your own.

**“MS may have good and bad days, but if martial arts is something you never thought you would be able to do, think again! I gladly accepted an invitation to attend the annual Disability Karate Foundation event.**

**My favourite part of the day was how the competitors were treated like the real athletes, that they're not being patronised just because they're differently able.”**  
**Fugazi29**



# Do I need to take precautions because of my MS?

There are safety measures that everyone should take when exercising. Depending on how MS affects you, there may be particular things you need to think about.

## Speak to your GP

If you haven't exercised for a while, or you're thinking of doing more than you normally would, speak to your GP beforehand. Your GP might ask you to see a physiotherapist.

Just like anyone else, if you have other health issues, such as asthma, a heart condition or **osteoporosis**, these need to be taken into account with your exercise plans.

## Start slowly with any new plan

Don't try to do too much, too soon. Starting slowly with a new exercise plan lets your body get used to the new activity and also

helps you judge whether that choice of exercise is comfortable for you or not.

Over time you'll be able to find out what your limits are. You may notice your limits change as your abilities and fitness levels change. So adjustments here and there might be good for you.

## Warm up and cool down

To protect yourself against injury or making any muscle problems you may have worse, always warm up. Do gentle stretching, before any strenuous activity.

If you're doing aerobic exercise, you should start slowly, to build the heart rate gradually. To avoid muscles becoming tight and stiff, stretching should also be done as a 'cool-down' afterwards.

## Adapting to MS symptoms

Your MS symptoms may influence the exercise you choose to do. But

MS doesn't mean you need to stop doing activities and exercise you enjoy. For example, if you have vision problems you might choose other forms of exercise or adapted sports where eyesight isn't so important.

Muscle stiffness or painful sensations could make contact or movement uncomfortable. But by working with a physiotherapist, you might find more comfortable, but still effective activities.

Some people with MS have difficulties with their memory and with understanding complex explanations (known as 'cognitive problems'). If you do, you may find it useful to have written notes and diagrams from a physiotherapist or trainer.

A family member or carer might be able to learn the exercises with you to help you remember them.

You may want to use sports centres, exercise classes or personal trainers at gyms. If you do, consider any adjustments you might need the centre or trainer to make to take account of your MS.

This could include access to the facilities and whether the trainer has an understanding of MS. Has anyone else with MS in the area worked with the same trainer? Your local MS Society group might be aware of suitable groups or trainers.

If you have a physiotherapist, they may be able to talk with trainers to help them understand MS.

**“I can't decide whether to push my legs into doing more, or let them off the hook.**

**I've found that all I can do is try that bit more than my limbs are happy with, but at the same time see how I am feeling that day.”**

**Moira**

### **Heat sensitivity**

Many people with MS – though not all – are sensitive to heat. Some people say that humidity can affect them too. Illness or infection, hot weather and exercise can all raise your body's temperature. This can make your

MS symptoms feel temporarily worse or cause fatigue, weakness or vision problems.

This is known as Uhthoff's phenomenon. It probably happens because heat makes it harder for your body to exchange messages between your brain and the rest of your body. Symptoms fade away after your body cools down again. These temporary changes shouldn't be a reason not to exercise.

Some people adjust the exercise they choose to be sure they are safe even if symptoms occur. Others find effective ways to stay cool and keep effects to a minimum. Here are some practical things you can try if you're heat sensitive:

- Try to stay away from swimming pools that are too hot. How warm is 'too warm' will be different from person to person, but as a rough guide, try to find a pool where the water temperature is below 29°C
- Try to break up exercise sessions into smaller sections, with regular breaks, to stay cool
- Iced drinks, wearing a 'cooling vest' and a cool bath before exercise might help you avoid temporary symptoms and let you exercise longer. 'Cooling sprays' can give temporary relief from hot conditions
- For some people a cooling bath or shower after exercise can help speed up recovery
- Choose **resistance exercise** instead of **aerobic exercise**
- Wherever you exercise, try to keep the space well ventilated. A fan might help

Be careful when you apply ice or cold packs directly to your skin, or when using cooling garments or cold water to cool your body.

MS can cause changes to how you experience temperature. It can change the feeling that would normally tell you when something's too hot or cold. So take care not to damage your skin.

Your GP, physiotherapist, occupational therapist or MS nurse can help make sure your cooling techniques don't harm you.

# How can a physiotherapist help?

Physiotherapy can help when there's a specific problem or ongoing symptoms that affect your day-to-day activities, mobility and independence.

Physiotherapy helps at all levels of disability. But it's especially useful when your physical symptoms get worse, or when you're recovering from a relapse.

A physiotherapist works with you to assess your physical difficulties. They help you to improve your movement and other functions of the body. Helping you stay active is one of the key ways they do this.

If MS is affecting the sports or activities you're able to do, they might suggest new ways to stay active, or ways to adapt what you want to do to suit your situation.

A physiotherapist can also suggest particular activities

to treat and manage specific problems, such as difficulties with mobility, balance, posture and fatigue. Bladder problems, pain, muscle spasms and stiffness can also be targeted by physiotherapy.

If appropriate, physiotherapy might involve a physiotherapist working hands-on with you. For example, they may hold and move your limbs for passive stretching and range-of-motion exercise.

## Sports equipment and aids

Some people with MS benefit from using sports equipment and aids when exercising. Some of these may be suggested by a physiotherapist.

For example, exercise bikes and rowing machines can offer quite strenuous activity in a controlled environment. This could be useful if your vision, coordination or balance problems make these kinds of activities difficult outdoors.

**“I learnt how to use the theraband at a ‘stretch and tone’ class. It’s something that, with just five minutes several times a day, can work wonders. And you can still watch telly at the same time - whether sat, stood, or lying down.”**  
**Spacejacket**

A standing frame can be an aid to weight-bearing activity. Weights strapped around your wrists or ankles might help strengthen your arms or legs.

Aids and equipment can help with difficulties with balance, muscle weakness or other symptoms. For example, trekking poles and walking sticks can help you keep balanced if you go walking.



If you have more strength in your arms than your legs, a hand-cycle might be an option. This is a bike powered by pedals for the hands instead of the feet. There are both indoor and outdoor versions.

### How do I get physiotherapy?

Your GP, neurologist or MS nurse can refer you to a physiotherapist. You may be able to refer yourself.

The guidelines on how MS should be treated in the NHS recommend physiotherapy to help with many symptoms of MS. This includes with walking difficulties, muscle spasms and stiffness, swallowing difficulties and muscle weakness.

Access to a physiotherapist varies from place to place. You may not receive ongoing treatment on the NHS, but instead be given a limited number of sessions.

For some people it might be offered following a relapse. For others it may be suggested when there's a change in symptoms like increased muscle stiffness or mobility problems.

A physiotherapist will sometimes teach you exercises that you can carry out between appointments, maybe with the help of a family member or carer.

It's best when your physiotherapist keeps track of how you're coming along with your activities to see what works for you and what doesn't. Changes can then be made to make the programme work for you.

Physiotherapy is mainly available as an out-patient treatment. You visit the hospital just for the treatment appointment, then leave again. But if fatigue, spasticity or other MS symptoms don't allow you to travel to and from the local hospital, a physiotherapist may be able to visit you in your own home.

Some areas have MS or **neurological rehabilitation** teams with specialist neuro-physiotherapists. It's always worth asking your GP, neurologist or MS nurse if there's a team in your area, and if you can be referred to them.



Local access to physiotherapy is sometimes available at non-specialist **rehabilitation** clinics. Or sessions may be organised by your local MS Society group. Your local MS Therapy Centre may also have physiotherapy clinics. Contact the National MS Therapy Centre (page 48) for one near you.

Physiotherapy is also available privately. If you're thinking of paying for it, find registered therapists who specialise in neurology through the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy. Details are at the back of this booklet.

**“I guess the most common involvement we have is after a patient has had a relapse. We try to get patients as close to how they were moving and managing before the relapse. We do this mainly through exercise but we also use equipment. I've seen this work successfully with many patients who have relapsed over the years.”**  
**Lydney, physiotherapist**





# Exercise for specific MS symptoms

As well as improving your general health, exercise and physiotherapy may help with specific MS symptoms. A physiotherapist can help you find the most effective level and style of exercise for your symptoms.

## Fatigue

Fatigue is one of the most common MS symptoms.

It seems to go against common sense to exert yourself if you have fatigue. But exercise can bring improvements in strength, fitness and mood. All these might help you to manage your fatigue.

But it's important to balance exercise with rest, and to keep cool while you exercise. This is especially true if getting hot during exercise makes your fatigue worse.

Good posture can help your body work more efficiently, causing

less strain and using less energy. This too may help with managing fatigue. One clinical trial showed that yoga helped reduce some people's levels of fatigue. **Resistance exercise** may also help. For further information see our booklet 'Fatigue'.

## Balance and walking difficulties

People with MS often find balance is a problem. There can be a number of reasons for this.

Changes in sensation, vision problems and MS-related damage in the brain or spinal cord can all upset your balance. This can cause problems with walking. So can loss of strength in the legs, muscle stiffness or spasms.

**“I do yoga twice a week and I find it helps my mood a lot. I'm also having fewer spasms ever since I started.”**

**Anonymous**

Carefully designed **physiotherapy** programmes can help people improve their balance and ability to walk. These might concentrate on stretching, strengthening and posture.

Research suggests that positive effects wear off quickly if the exercise programme is stopped.

To maintain improvements, a physiotherapist might find exercises you can continue between check-ups, either on your own or with the help of a member of your family or carer.

**“I don’t know which helps most but I swim a lot and enjoy that. I also do pilates and short walks when I can.”**  
**Anonymous**

Some people feel that balance and breath exercises help control their walking and balance.

Popular examples are yoga, tai chi and pilates. Clinical trials have found some benefits from tai chi, such as improved walking speed.

We don’t know which forms of exercise are the most effective. So find one that works best for you, your condition and your lifestyle.

A small study on tai chi in people with MS who can walk found it improved balance, coordination, fatigue and depression.

While it generally doesn’t cause any serious problems, be careful not to strain joints or muscles when doing exercises like tai chi. Outdoor walking and aerobics may also help with balance.

See our booklet ‘Balance and MS’ for more information.

### **Muscle spasms and stiffness**

Almost 50% of people with MS have muscle spasms and stiffness, though the effects are different from person to person. At least 20% of the people affected in this way will experience muscle spasms.

Physiotherapy, including stretching and range-of-motion exercises, can help you treat and manage symptoms. These are gentle stretching exercises that

move each joint as far as possible in all directions. Normal daily activities don't take joints through their full range of motion.

Yoga may also improve your flexibility and you may feel less muscle stiffness. Research has found some benefits from tai chi exercise, including reduced muscle stiffness. Pilates may also help, although there's been limited research in this area. A small study on people who did not have MS showed pilates improved flexibility.

More information is in our booklet 'Muscle spasms and stiffness'.

## **Bladder and bowel problems**

People with MS can experience a variety of bladder problems. Some get an urgent or very frequent need to go to the toilet – known as 'urgency' and 'frequency'. Others find that exercising, sneezing or coughing causes leakage. This is called 'stress incontinence'.

Strengthening the muscles that support your bladder or pelvic floor may help. A

continence adviser, MS nurse or physiotherapist can help you with pelvic floor exercises.

Bowel problems are less common but can be distressing. Keeping physically active may help with bowel control.

Read more in our booklets 'MS and your bladder' and 'MS and your bowels'.

## **Low mood, anxiety and depression**

MS can affect your emotions as well as your body. Exercise may help with low mood, anxiety or depression.

Research tells us regular aerobic exercise helps relieve mild to moderate depression. Group activities like tai chi can offer social and emotional support. You may find exercise is a good way to meet new people.

Read more in our booklet 'MS and your Emotions'.

# How can an occupational therapist help?

An occupational therapist (OT) can help you do everyday activities that you can't do anymore because of your MS.

An OT can suggest changes to your environment, help you use special equipment and advise you on different ways of doing a task or activity. An OT can also advise on adaptations to make your daily life easier.

An OT looks at all aspects of daily life, from the home to the school or workplace.

An occupational therapist can:

- assess your home or workplace
- assess your ability to complete activities at home or work, and find ways to help
- find ways to manage your MS symptoms at home or at work

- provide training
- help your employer(s) manage your return to work
- monitor your progress

To arrange an OT assessment, contact your local social services department. Your GP can also make a referral for you.

They can also advise on grants that may be available for adaptations. There's more information about adaptations in the MS Society booklet 'Adaptations and your home'.

The professional body for occupational therapists working in a wide range of areas in the UK is the British Association of Occupational Therapy (BAOT). Their details can be found at the back of this booklet.



Cubicle 3 ↓

# How can I fit exercise into my life?

Exercise needs to be a regular part of your life if you want it to benefit you. So it's important to find the right activities and exercises for you – ones that you enjoy doing, suit your lifestyle and match your physical needs.

When looking at different sports and activities, ask yourself:

- When are the best times for me to exercise? Symptoms and drug side effects may vary through the day, so you might need to consider this when planning to exercise.
- What motivates me? Some people prefer competitive sports, or exercising in a group. Others work better alone, with personal goals to achieve.
- Is there good access to the facilities I need? As well as being able to get around the

changing rooms, gym or hall, think about transport to and from the venue. Voluntary groups, such as your local MS Society group can sometimes help.

- What are the costs? Some activities are free. But if you pay for exercise classes, sports clubs, special clothing or equipment, there could be costs to consider.

There may be groups running cheaper classes in your area, perhaps linked to the local MS Society group.

Remember that exercising doesn't have to be expensive. For example, a physiotherapist can help you find ways to get the same physical workout at home as you might get in a members gym.

Many sports centres have reduced rates if you receive benefits such as Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment.



In some areas, doctors prescribe exercise and might arrange for you to exercise for free at a local fitness centre.

There are local initiatives called **Inclusive Fitness Initiatives** (IFI) that could help you access fitness. Most of these are in England, although there are some in other areas of the UK. The IFI website has details of accredited initiatives. Contact details are at the end of this booklet.

If your MS symptoms change, you may have to change the exercise you do. But if you feel able to carry on with exercises you've been doing all along, then there's no reason to automatically stop.

But listen to your body. It's important to be realistic. An unrealistic exercise plan can be frustrating and energy-sapping and make it harder to stay motivated.

On the other hand, if you find something that works for you, it can be inspiring and energising.

- Try and change your routine. If you take the bus, get off one stop earlier than usual. That way you can get more steps in.
- If you have a smartphone, you could get an app to track the exercise you do, steps you take and perhaps what you eat. Keeping an eye on how much you move and eat will help you to better manage your health.
- These apps are usually linked to user forums or chat groups. You can share your experiences with like-minded people and motivate each another. This support might encourage you to stay on track - or challenge you to do more!

You might find our exercise DVD and videos useful. They present a range of simple, gentle exercises and stretches you might want to try. They're suitable for people with varying levels of ability. Find out more on page 42.

For support on walking with your condition have a look at the Walking for Health website at [walkingforhealth.org.uk](http://walkingforhealth.org.uk)

Also, there are tips on gardening in a wheelchair available at [carryongardening.org.uk](http://carryongardening.org.uk)

**“I am in a wheelchair and I do regular ‘press-ups’ where I lift my bum off the cushion to avoid pressure sores.”**  
**Anonymous**





# How do I stay motivated?

Even though your MS symptoms may flare up, try to focus on how being and staying active helps you manage other areas in your life. This could be meeting friends, feeling independent and having fun.

A practical way to help you stay motivated and focused is to set goals for yourself and join a support group.

You can set your goals by looking at the type of activity you do and deciding what you'd like to achieve. Perhaps you'd like to:

- be more flexible (bending forward and touching your knees, shins or feet)
- stay active for a longer period of time than you're used to. To begin with you can walk ten minutes and over time increase that to 30 minutes
- enter into a gardening competition or take part in a walk-wheelathon

## Setting goals

To help you achieve your goals, it's important to set up a schedule. That way you can see how you're improving. It's the small steps taken over time that add up to achieving your goals.

If at the moment you're able to do a certain activity for ten minutes and would like to see that increased to 30 minutes, setting up a schedule can help you to do that.

Start with a foundation and make a six week schedule for yourself. For example, if your activity of choice is gardening, walking or swimming, try to do this a fixed number of times each week. At first you might be able to do it twice a week for ten minutes.

Try to do this for two weeks. See if you can increase both sessions each week by five minutes, so you're up to 30 minutes twice a week by week six. The workout log on pages 36 and 37 will help you start your own schedule.

If you need help setting up a schedule, ask your physiotherapist. Or if you're a member of your local leisure centre or gym, they can help you set up a schedule.

They'll most likely to use **physiotoools.com** to create an exercise programme tailored to your rehabilitation and fitness.

Other online schedules to help you plan your activities are:

**mapometer.com**

**freetrainers.com** - free customised exercise workout plans

**myfitnesspal.com** - a food and exercise tracker. It also has info on apps to use for your smartphone.

If you have a smartphone, you can also try using a sports app

together with a fitness tracker. That's an easy way to track your progress and your goals.

Most fitness trackers measure heart rate and amount of calories burned. This lets you monitor your weight as well.

There's often a blog or user forum to join, so you can share experiences and motivate each other.

## Support group

If you're in a support group, you can share your good and bad days with like-minded people.

Many people find it easier to stick to a plan or routine when there are other people like friends and perhaps family involved.

# Workout Log

Activity	Time	Distance
<b>Week 1:</b>		
Monday		
Wednesday		
Friday		
<b>Week 2:</b>		
Monday		
Wednesday		
Friday		
<b>Week 3:</b>		
Monday		
Wednesday		
Friday		
<b>Week 4:</b>		
Monday		
Wednesday		
Friday		
<b>Week 5:</b>		
Monday		
Wednesday		
Friday		
<b>Week 6:</b>		
Monday		
Wednesday		
Friday		



# When I'm not able to exercise

Sometimes you won't feel able to exercise, or you'll feel it's best to do less than you usually do.

During a relapse don't carry on exercising until your symptoms have 'levelled out' and you've finished any steroid treatment.

A physiotherapist can help you maintain muscle tone and mobility after a relapse. They can get you back into a routine as you recover. This is called '**rehabilitation**'.

Your MS symptoms can change from day to day as well as over longer periods of time. If you notice changes in your symptoms, or new symptoms, you may need to change how much you do.

For example, if you have a week or two where your fatigue is worse than normal, you may decide to rest more and exercise a little less. That way you'll save energy for other tasks you want or need to do.

If this goes on for longer, a physiotherapist might suggest new ways to exercise so you can stay active in spite of your fatigue.

Whatever your reasons for taking a break from exercise, remember to start again slowly. If you need to, set lower targets for yourself to begin with. Steadily build up to a level you can manage well.

**“The more you exercise those muscles, the more they will come back - but slowly.**

**If you can exercise in a swimming pool or a large bath, you'll find this easier to get you started.**

**But you must also put weight through your joints. As long as there's even a little muscle tone, you can exercise to improve it.”**

**Liz**

# My MS is quite advanced. What exercise is right for me?

Exercise is good for you if you have high levels of disability. If your MS is quite advanced, think of working with a physiotherapist to find comfortable exercises that meet your needs.

The physiotherapist will help you find exercises that help you manage your symptoms and limit the knock-on effects of MS.

## Passive stretching and range-of-motion exercises

These can help with muscle stiffness. They can prevent your joints from 'locking up'. They can stop your muscles from becoming painful and deconditioned through lack of use.

If passive stretching and range-of-motion exercises are helpful, your family and carers might be able to help you with this inbetween **physiotherapy** sessions.

A physiotherapist can work with them to show how such exercises should be done, and to give carers confidence to help. But paid carers or carers from social services aren't always able to carry out these kinds of duties because of legal restrictions.

To get the help you need, ask for stretching and range-of-motion exercises to be written into your social services 'care package' if or when you get one. This means they'll be seen as essential parts of the care you need, and should be provided.

## Strength and posture

Good posture can make a big difference to your comfort and health if you spend a lot of time sitting or lying down. Muscle spasms and swallowing problems might trouble you less if you change how you sit or stand.

Your breathing can also be helped by an upright posture. It allows your lungs and throat to open more easily.

Muscle strength is important for good posture, and to make sure your muscles are strong. So a physiotherapist may suggest strengthening exercises.

These can work alongside stretching and range-of-motion exercises. This makes it easier for you to move from one position to another, such as using the toilet, or getting into bed.

### **Finding exercise in everyday activities**

Everyday tasks and movements can provide useful exercise. Housework can be good exercise, such as:

- sweeping the kitchen floor
- wiping down a table top
- reaching and stretching for things

A physiotherapist or occupational therapist might suggest small

changes to make sure you get the most from the activities you do.

By changing the layout of things around you, you may be able to create stretches for your arms.

Keeping something that's in regular use at full reach (a pen or a cup for example) creates some exercise each time it's needed (but take care that it's safe to do so).

Fitting physical activity into your daily life like this makes it easier to do something every day. It gives you the benefits of regular stretching, strengthening and movement.





## Exercise videos, DVDs and books

Our website has video clips with exercises for all types of mobility, including pilates and yoga. They're at [mssociety.org.uk/staying-active](https://mssociety.org.uk/staying-active)

We have a free DVD called 'MS and exercise: move more with MS'. Order it on **0300 500 8084** or visit [mssociety.org.uk/publications](https://mssociety.org.uk/publications)

We also have two factsheets ('Posture and Movement' 1 and 2) that recommend ways to keep good posture and make the most of your physical abilities and move safely.

Other things out there that you might find useful include:

### ***Move it for MS! The fun way to exercise with Mr Motivator.***

Published by the MS Trust. (2007). A DVD of exercises developed by an MS physiotherapist in conjunction with Mr Motivator. Available from the MS Trust on **01462 476700** or go to [mstrust.org.uk](https://mstrust.org.uk) or view the videos on YouTube.

***Yoga Tips for People with MS:*** by Sue Lee (2009). A book of simple techniques to improve posture and mobility.

***Leanne's chair workout*** by Leanne Grose. Published by Ilc Media (2007). A DVD of exercises for people who use wheelchairs. Not MS specific.

***Single chair yoga – volume 1*** by Lakshmi Voelker. (2007). A yoga DVD for people who use wheelchairs. Not MS specific.

***Stretching for people with MS*** by Beth Gibson (2007). Diagrams and descriptions of exercises you can do on your own. Available to download from the website of the US MS Society at [nationalmssociety.org/Resources-Support/Library-Education-Programs/Brochures/All-Brochures](https://nationalmssociety.org/Resources-Support/Library-Education-Programs/Brochures/All-Brochures)



# New words explained

**aerobic exercise** – also called ‘cardio’. This strengthens your heart and lungs, and improves the way your body uses oxygen. Walking, cycling and dancing are all examples of aerobic exercise

**deconditioning** – when a muscle isn’t used for long periods, loses strength and becomes painful

**cardiovascular exercise** – see aerobic exercise

**cognitive problems** – we use the term cognitive when we’re talking about your mind. Examples of cognitive problems are difficulties with learning, memory, perception, and problem solving

**complementary therapies** – are used alongside, or in addition to, conventional medical treatments. People

use them to boost their physical or emotional health, or to relieve symptoms or side effects. Tai Chi and yoga are examples of complementary therapies

**neurological rehabilitation** – a therapy that can help reduce pain, help with balance and coordination, and restore your range of movement and motion. These are symptoms you might have because MS has effected your nervous system. Others include blurred vision, difficulty walking, weak muscles and fatigue

**osteoporosis** – when your bones are weak and can break easily. Osteoporosis is usually discovered when you’ve had a fall or banged yourself against something. Your bones, such as your wrist or hip, fracture easily

**physiotherapy** – therapy to help restore movement and function when you're affected by injury, illness or disability. A physiotherapist helps with this

**rehabilitation** – when a physiotherapist guides you to maintain muscle tone and mobility after you've had a relapse. It helps get you back into a routine as you recover

**resistance exercise** – exercise that makes your muscles tighten ('contract'). A resistance object is used to make your muscles contract. This leads to stronger muscles, more endurance and more muscle tone. Objects used include weights, a stretch band or the weight of your body)

**(scientific) evidence** – we use the term evidence to describe when tests have been done to prove a (medical) claim does or

doesn't work. Usually the larger the test, the more reliable the proof is. When we say there's 'little evidence', we mean that there have been few tests and/or tests with a small number of persons



# Useful organisations

## Brain & Spine Foundation

LG01, Lincoln House

Kennington Park

1-3 Brixton Road

London SW9 6DE

020 7793 5900

[brainandspine.org.uk](http://brainandspine.org.uk)

## Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

The professional body for physiotherapists in the UK. They can provide details of registered physiotherapists who specialise in conditions like MS.

14 Bedford Row

London WC1R 4ED

020 7306 6666

[csp.org.uk](http://csp.org.uk)

## College of Occupational Therapists

The professional body for occupational therapy staff. They can provide details of registered occupational therapists.

106-114 Borough High Street

London SE1 1LB

020 7357 6480

[COT.org.uk](http://COT.org.uk)

## English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS)

SportPark, Loughborough

University, 3 Oakwood

Drive, Loughborough,

Leicestershire LE11 3QF

01509 227750

[activityalliance.org.uk](http://activityalliance.org.uk)

## Disability Sports NI

Adelaide House, Falcon Rd

Belfast BT12 6SJ

028 9038 7062

Textphone 028 9038 7064

[dsni.co.uk](http://dsni.co.uk)

## Scottish Disability Sport

Caledonia House, South Gyle

Edinburgh EH12 9DQ

0131 317 1130

[scottishdisabilitysport.com](http://scottishdisabilitysport.com)

## Disability Sport Wales

Sport Wales National Centre

Sophia Gardens

Cardiff CF11 9SW

0845 846 0021

[disabilitysportwales.com/](http://disabilitysportwales.com/)

## **Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI)**

Supports the fitness industry to become more inclusive, increasing participation by disabled people.

01509 227750

[efds.co.uk](http://efds.co.uk)

## **Multiple Sclerosis National Therapy Centres**

A federation of therapy centres around the UK. They offer a variety of therapies. Some centres offer physiotherapy clinics and water-based exercise.

PO Box 2199

Buckingham

MK18 8AR

01296 711699

[msntc.org](http://msntc.org)

## **NHS**

The Live Well section of their website has information on all aspects of healthy living, including diet and nutrition.

[nhs.uk/livewell](http://nhs.uk/livewell)

The following NHS websites help motivate and support you to make and stick to changes that will improve your health. They help you find local disability sports and classes.

**Change4Life** (England and Wales)

[nhs.uk/change4life](http://nhs.uk/change4life)

**Eat better feel better** (Scotland)

[eatbetterfeelbetter.co.uk](http://eatbetterfeelbetter.co.uk)

**Get a life, get active** (N.Ireland)

[getalifegotactive.com](http://getalifegotactive.com)

## **Thrive**

Thrive helps people with a disability to start or continue gardening.

0118 988 5688

[carryongardening.org.uk](http://carryongardening.org.uk)

## **Wheelpower**

Provides opportunities throughout the year to introduce people to wheelchair sport.

Stoke Mandeville Stadium

Guttman Road

Stoke Mandeville

Buckinghamshire

HP21 9PP

01296 395995

[wheelpower.org.uk](http://wheelpower.org.uk)





# Further information

## Resources

Our award winning information resources cover every aspect of living with MS.

To order email:

**[shop@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:shop@mssociety.org.uk)**  
or visit **[mssociety.org.uk/  
publications](https://www.mssociety.org.uk/publications)**

## MS Helpline

The freephone MS Helpline offers confidential emotional support and information for anyone affected by MS, including family, friends and carers.

Information is available in over 150 languages through an interpreter service.

**0808 800 8000**  
**(closed weekends and  
bank holidays)**  
**[helpline@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:helpline@mssociety.org.uk)**

# About this resource

With thanks to all the people affected by MS and professionals who contributed to this booklet.

If you have any comments on this information, please send them to: [resources@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:resources@mssociety.org.uk)

**Disclaimer:** We have made every effort to ensure that the information in this publication is correct. We do not accept liability for any errors or omissions.

## References

A list of references is available on request. Call **0300 500 8084**.

## Photography

Credit for photography belongs to Amit Lennon and Simon Rawles.

This resource is also available in large print.

Call **0300 500 8084**  
or email **shop@mssociety.org.uk**

# Contact us



## MS Helpline

Freephone 0808 800 8000  
(closed on weekends and bank holidays)  
helpline@mssociety.org.uk

## MS National Centre

0300 500 8084  
info@mssociety.org.uk  
supportercare@mssociety.org.uk

## Online

mssociety.org.uk  
facebook.com/MSSociety  
twitter.com/mssocietyuk

## MS Society Scotland

0131 335 4050  
msscotland@mssociety.org.uk

## MS Society Northern Ireland

028 9080 2802  
nireception@mssociety.org.uk

## MS Society Cymru

0300 500 8084  
mscymru@mssociety.org.uk

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