

## SAFETY ADVICE CONTINUED

- Symptoms such as fatigue, visual problems or muscle stiffness may temporarily increase but should settle down fairly quickly. If these persist seek advice from a medical professional on how to adapt your exercise.
- Exercise generates heat and even a small increase in body temperature can cause a temporary but significant deterioration in the MS symptoms outlined above, during or after exercise. The long-term benefits of exercise should outweigh these side effects but if you experience any of these symptoms try and ensure your exercise environment is not too hot:
- Use wipes to cool down your skin
- Drink plenty of cold fluid before, during and after exercise

- Wear lightweight or special cooling clothing
- Work at a pace that doesn't allow you to become extremely overheated
- Use an air-conditioned environment or fans
- As you start out, alternate rest periods with activity periods
- Tell your instructor you have MS so they can allow for any adaptations needed such as taking more rests
- Monitor and record any adverse symptoms and discuss them with your health professional or gym instructor.

## MORE INFORMATION

- MS Society - Helpline 0808 800 8000 [www.mssociety.org.uk](http://www.mssociety.org.uk)

## PROFESSIONAL'S DETAILS

## Notes/Local information

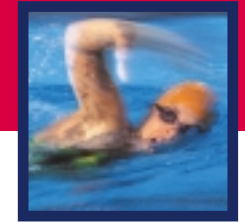
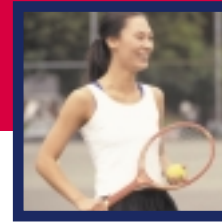
## WHO IS SPORTEX/HEALTHEX?

We specialise in producing information and resources for medical, health and exercise professionals around the subject of exercise, health and musculoskeletal injury. This includes a range of subscription-based publications and accompanying advice handouts for patients and clients. All our material is produced by leading medical professionals and reviewed by peers working in relevant industries. For more information visit [www.sportex.net](http://www.sportex.net)



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# EXERCISE FOR PEOPLE WITH MS



## ■ WHAT IS MS?

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a disease affecting the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) which progresses over time. You will experience improvements and relapses during this time.

## ■ HOW CAN EXERCISE HELP?

Tiredness and general movement problems can mean you do less and less in your day. This increases your risk of developing other illnesses like heart disease, osteoporosis, diabetes and high blood pressure. Although it is not possible to alter the main damage to the nerve pathways caused by MS, you can prevent some of the loss of function caused by inactivity. Even in the early stages of MS your activities of daily living and your ability to exercise may be affected by balance and co-ordination problems, muscle weakness

and changes in muscle flexibility. As a result you may start to delegate daily tasks to other family members.

Studies of people with MS carrying out aerobic exercise have shown that it can improve both your physical health and your quality of life.

### Physical activity can:

- Train muscles to work better
- May lead to an improvement in co-ordination
- Improve levels of fitness

### Exercises may:

- Improve the range of movement of your joints
- Improve balance
- Help relieve the effects the MS has on your muscles

All of these factors will help you to gain health benefits.

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# Be active - be safe - have fun!



# EXERCISE FOR PEOPLE WITH MS

## HOW CAN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY HELP YOU?

- It can help you lose weight particularly if you combine this with eating healthy food
- It helps build muscle which means you burn more calories even when you're not exercising.
- It helps protect you against other conditions which cause ill health like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and some cancers.
- Did you know that several short bouts of activity (eg. 3 x 10 minutes) is as useful as 30 continuous minutes?
- Physical activity, along with a healthy diet, helps reduce stress and improves your overall feeling of well-being and quality of life, as well as helps you to sleep well
- Exercise can also be very helpful in lifting your mood.

## STAYING SAFE

If you experience any of the following problems stop exercising and ask for medical advice from your GP or by contacting NHS Direct on 0845 4647:

- Discomfort in your chest or upper body
- Uncomfortable or severe breathlessness brought on by physical activity
- Dizziness or nausea on exertion
- Fainting during or just after doing
- Palpitations (a very fast or irregular physical activity heart beat) during activity.
- You shouldn't exercise during an acute relapse, so ask a physiotherapist for advice. It won't be realistic to continue where you left off so lower your expectations and start slowly.

## WHAT TYPE OF ACTIVITY IS BEST?

While stamina-based activity is particularly important for health, flexibility-based activity is useful if you have muscle stiffness or spasticity and if you have balance or coordination difficulties then Pilates or T'ai Chi may be more useful.

If you feel weak or fatigued then exercise like walking and cycling may be useful and you can always use a treadmill or a static bike if you want to stay indoors. If you are in a wheelchair, there is adapted equipment such as an upper body bike.

### Tips on increasing your activity level

- Walking is an ideal activity as it's free and easy to do anywhere. Perhaps take a dog for a walk to make it more interesting or use a pedometer to count your steps (see back page). If you would be more motivated to exercise with other people, look into local exercise referral schemes for people with MS.
- Look for opportunities to be active during your whole day. For example park at the far end of the car park, or walk one stop further to catch the bus, and take 10 minutes out of your lunch break to go for a walk.
- Try using the stairs instead of the escalator. If you do use the escalator, start by walking part of the way and gradually progress to walking up the whole way.
- Choose activities that you enjoy doing. Involve your friends and family to make your activities fun, sociable and enjoyable.

## HOW MUCH AND HOW OFTEN?

**Frequency** The first step is to check with a health professional as everyone with MS is affected differently. The main aim is to build up to 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 or more days of the week. If this seems too much to start with, try starting with 3 x 5-10 minute walks spread throughout the day and work towards 30 continuous minutes. Remember doing something is better than nothing.

**Intensity** Moderate intensity means breathing harder and getting warmer than normal. It does not need to be hard. You should be able to talk and be active at the same time.

**Advice** Whatever your chosen activity, it should be performed at a gentle intensity which gradually increases for about 10 minutes until you have reached the level you can maintain for your chosen period of activity. This gets the blood flowing to your muscles and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. When you are nearing the end of your activity you should also slowly decrease the level of activity over 5-10 minutes to allow your heart rate to slow down gradually.

**Remember** Set yourself realistic goals and don't worry if you miss one day. Just make sure that the next day you pick up where you left off.