

Exercise Guidance for Musculoskeletal Conditions

This leaflet gives guidance for exercising with a musculoskeletal condition, including the benefits, risks and any alternatives. If you have any further questions, please speak to your physiotherapist .

Why is exercise often prescribed for a musculoskeletal injury or condition?

- Exercise can help with symptoms of musculoskeletal conditions such as joint pain, joint stiffness, muscle weakness or improving your confidence related to an activity in your daily life.
- Exercise can help improve our mood and our sleep.
- Exercise can aid weight management; obesity is associated with some musculoskeletal conditions.

How do I know the exercises are at the right level?

As part of exercise prescription, often our aim is to progress that exercise over time to achieve the goal or activity you would like to do.

When to progress?

- If you have completed your repetitions and sets of exercise with ease or if you feel you could do a lot more.
- You are not having an increase in pain during exercise.
- You feel confident completing the exercise.

Examples of progression may be increasing repetitions, adding weight or resistance or trying a new variation.

When to maintain?

- The exercise is challenging but doable.
- You have recently progressed your exercise.

When to regress?

- Your pain is too high or worsening.
- The exercise is too difficult and you aren't able to complete your repetitions or sets.
- You feel unsafe completing the exercise.

Examples of how to regress an exercise might be reducing the weight or load, reducing the number of repetitions or intensity, or reducing the depth of the exercise (e.g. squat).

How to exercise with pain?

Exercising when you have pain can seem daunting and it is understandable why you might not be sure how much to exercise or if this is the right thing to do. However, exercise is safe and beneficial for those who have pain.

We use the **traffic light system** to guide how much exercise to do:

Red: Severe or new pain 7-10/10

Symptoms: unable to bear weight, a significant increase during or after exercise. Hot, red, swelling.

Stop and discuss with a therapist. If you think you need more immediate medical attention call NHS 111.

Amber: Moderate pain 4-6/10

Pain during or after exercise which settles within 2-6 hours.

Continue exercise, consider adapting or regressing.

Green: Mild pain or discomfort 0-3/10

A slight increase in pain or discomfort during exercise, which settles within 30-60 minutes.

Continue exercise and consider progression.

Flare ups and setbacks

Part of recovery from a musculoskeletal condition may mean you have good days and bad days which are very common. On a good day, stick to your exercises and steadily progress, rather than make sudden large changes in activity. On a bad day, consider adapting the amount or intensity of exercise. Flare ups are usually temporary and do pass.

Other tips to help recover from a flare up:

Rest - keep moving, but ease off the intensity of activity.	Do something you enjoy – be kind to yourself and distraction can be helpful.
Gentle exercise – do you have any stretches or movements that feel good?	Communication – let someone know you are having a bad day, e.g. a friend, family member or work.
Stay positive – flare ups do pass.	Relaxation and recognise stress – this often has an impact on our pain intensity.
Consider use of ice and heat	Consider medication

Other useful information

GetUBetter self management tool: If you have access to the internet and / or a smartphone, we recommend using the getUBetter app ([getUBetter - Request Access](#)). It provides tailored support and advice for your symptoms. Please use the QR code below to access. Alternatively, it can be accessed by your GP practice if you live in Southwest London. If your symptoms persist, you can access physiotherapy via the app. If you don't have access to the internet or a smartphone, please contact your GP practice for advice.



For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings.

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS UK

The NHS provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. **Web:** www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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