

The importance of exercise for people with Mitochondrial Disease

Each person with Mitochondrial Disease will experience a different pattern of symptoms. Some people may feel more fatigued, some may have muscle weakness, and others may be limited in how much exercise they can do. Even though it may be more difficult to exercise, it is important for your general health to keep as active as possible. Being less active causes muscles to become weak, and will affect your general health. This leaflet provides some ideas about how you may be able to increase activity. Your physiotherapist can provide more individualised advice as needed.

The benefits of keeping active

Exercise and activity are important for everyone. The less time spent sitting still, the better a person's life expectancy and the smaller the chance of developing health problems such as heart disease, stroke or diabetes. People with long term conditions, who have difficulty exercising can benefit from short bouts of increased activity. Reducing the time you sit and taking more steps in the day can be as, if not more, helpful than going to the gym for a workout.

Keeping active also helps to:

- Prevent muscle weakness caused by inactivity
- Improve balance (reduce risk of falling)
- Maintain muscle strength and independence
- Improve mood quality of life and fatigue

Key points and considerations for when you start to exercise

Make sure that you focus on:

- Slowly warming up before exercise this increases the blood flow to your muscles and reduces the risk of injury;
- Cooling down at the end of your session low intensity exercise, such as a slow walk for, helps your body to warm up before and recover after exercising;
- Stretching after exercise is important.



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When exercising:

- You may start to take deeper breaths, but you should still be able to talk in full sentences. The exercise may make you start to sweat a little.
- Do not exercise to exhaustion.
- You may feel some mild discomfort (e.g. a gentle muscle ache or stretch) during exercise. This is ok during the exercises but it should settle quickly when you stop the exercise. You should not have lasting symptoms afterwards.
- After you have been exercising for some time, you should feel as good as or better than you did before you exercised.
- Muscle soreness after exercise should not last longer than 48 hours.
- Pace your exercise in short bouts, and increase the amount slowly so you don't aggravate fatigue.

Try to aim to build up to exercise 3 times a week for 30 minutes each time. You could do 3 lots of ten minutes instead of a full 30 minutes in one go.

Stop exercising and contact the Physiotherapist or your GP if you experience:

- muscle pain more than 48 hours after exercise;
- shortness of breath, palpitations, dizziness
- or a change in symptoms during or after exercising.