

EXERCISE



A Polio Services Victoria Production

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What Is Exercise?

Exercise can take many forms – example, taking the stairs rather than walking to the letterbox, or gardening can be considered exercise. For the less able bodied, tasks such as propelling a wheelchair or standing up from a chair will also exercise the body. Formal exercise programs, prescribed by a therapist, are generally more specific and goal orientated. For example, the program goal may be to strengthen muscles to make standing from a chair easier.

A formal exercise program should always have a specific purpose, but the contents of a program can vary immensely. They may be land-based exercises or water-based (hydrotherapy) exercises. An informal exercise program might be instigated at home or work – for

Different types of exercise include:

- **Strengthening exercise**
To make muscles stronger
- **Cardiovascular exercise**
To improve general fitness or heart & lung function
- **Stretching exercise**
To improve flexibility

Is Exercise Safe?

There has been much publicity and discussion about exercise and the polio population.

For polio survivors there does need to be a balance between the late effects of polio and the benefits of exercise.

Recognised benefits of regular exercise include improved endurance or stamina, strength and flexibility.

Exercise can help to improve some post-polio symptoms, but too much exercise can also exacerbate fatigue and muscle weakness.

The balance can be a difficult one to strike, and is best achieved with the assistance of a physiotherapist or an exercise professional who understands the principles of exercise, **and** the late effects of polio.

Before you commence exercising, a detailed assessment of your polio history, residual effects of the polio and your current status should be completed.

You and your therapist should carefully monitor progress, and modify the exercise program accordingly. Providing your program is specifically designed it is safe to cautiously proceed with exercise.

Any exercise program should be carefully designed. Ask for the help of a professional who understands the basic principles of exercise, **and** the later effects of polio.

A physiotherapist, with experience treating polio survivors, is ideal.

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How Do I Know If Exercise Is Right For Me?

Many of our polio clients have had excellent results with individually tailored, and closely monitored exercise programs.

All exercises should be performed carefully, without increasing overall fatigue levels or “overusing” muscles. To identify the onset of muscle overuse, you need to “listen” to your body. Signs that you are overusing your muscles include:

- Heavy limbs or feeling generally sluggish
- Reduction in the quality or control of movement
- Quivering or flickering of muscles being exercised
- Other parts of the body start working harder (to compensate for tired muscles)
- Facial grimacing, jaw clenching or excessive tensing of other parts of your body

The Principles of Safe Exercise

To ensure that exercise is safe, and not doing damage to polio affected muscles (or any other part of your body!) it is best to follow these guidelines:

1. Make sure you know why you're doing the exercises.

Are they designed to: maintain your flexibility? Reduce pain? Improve your fitness? Improve your balance?

2. Start the program gradually

Start exercising at the lowest level and gradually build up. For example, start by exercising for 5 minutes and build up to 20 minutes per session.

3. Include regular rest days and short rest periods

Have at least one rest day between each exercise session. Help to manage fatigue by taking a rest in the middle of an exercise session or between each set of exercises.

The length of rest required will be different for everyone. To work out your particular needs, listen to your body and rest until you feel refreshed.

4. Keep resistance or weights low

With strengthening exercises, you should aim to gradually increase the number of repetitions rather than the amount of resistance (or weights).

5. Monitor your response to the exercise

How does your body feel? Overall, are you more fatigued or do you have more energy? Keeping an exercise diary where you note your response to exercise can be a very useful tool.

6. Be particularly aware of pain and fatigue

Stop any exercise that hurts!! If you are feeling tired or sore on an exercise day – don't exercise at all (or complete a very light session – very low weights and very low repetitions)

7. Regularly update your program with a therapist

Check your technique and ask questions. Be conscious of your overall fatigue levels, and consult your therapist if you feel that the exercise program makes you more fatigued and less able to cope with daily life.