MS Society

Moving more with MS

We're the MS Society and we're here for you. Funding world-leading research, sharing information, making voices heard and campaigning for everyone's rights.

Together we are a community. And together we will stop MS.

We rely on the generosity of people like you to fund our vital work. If you'd 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 **donate.mssociety.org.uk**
- Posting your donation to MS Society, Carriage House, 8 City North Place, London N4 3FU. Please make cheques payable to the 'MS Society'

Contents

A word from Kerstin, who has MS	4
Five things to know	5
About this booklet	7
Why should I stay active?	8
What sort of activity should I be doing?	10
Do I need to take precautions because of my MS?	16
How can a physiotherapist help?	19
Exercise for specific MS symptoms	23
How can an occupational therapist help?	26
How can I fit exercise into my life?	28
How do I stay motivated?	31
When I'm not able to exercise	36
My MS is quite advanced. What exercise is right for me?	37
Useful organisations	40

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!

Kerstin

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 – that'll help you stick with it

3. The right 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. Keep track of your activities so you can see how you're doing. Set goals and join a support group. An app or activity tracker might help

salus sports
salus sports
salus sports X-LITE

About this booklet

We hope this booklet inspires you to find new activities you enjoy, or stick with the ones you already love.

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

This booklet has information about the benefits of sports, physiotherapy, exercises and activities that keep you active.

MS affects each person differently and you'll have your own likes and dislikes. All kinds of movement can be good for you.

It's not always easy to find the time, but regular activity keeps your body working at its best.

If you're online, our website's got videos that take you step by step through lots of different options, including simple exercises, yoga, Pilates and football drills. The videos are designed for you to sit or stand as you follow along.

And anyone with MS in the UK can contact our MS Help Hub's Moving More with MS service. For help finding local activities, specialist services and more about healthy lifestyle. Call **0808 800 8000**

"Doing exercises every day is important. I 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

Why should I stay active?

Exercising and doing activities like walking, gardening or even housework can help your body and mind stay as healthy as possible.

It can help with MS symptoms and the knock-on effects of MS.

Keeping muscle strength and fitness

Exercise can stop or slow down the loss of muscle strength and fitness - sometimes called 'deconditioning'. That happens when a muscle isn't used for a long time. Deconditioning can make any mobility or strength problems worse, and it can be painful.

Strength and mobility problems might be symptoms of MS, so they can't always be avoided. But exercise can stop problems getting worse because of deconditioning.

Weight gain or loss

Exercise can help you control your weight, especially combined with a healthy, well-balanced diet. It's important to keep a healthy weight. But lots of people with MS see their weight change. You can ask your GP to refer you to a dietitian for advice and support.

"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

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a condition that makes bones weaker and more fragile. Gentle activity strengthens bones and can help prevent these problems.

Fact

Research tells us that exercise:

- improves the overall health of people with milder MS
- could help you stay as mobile and active as possible if you've got more severe MS
- improves fatigue, walking and balance in people with MS
- helps some people manage their MS symptoms including pain
- decreases the risk of heart disease and improves mood

You might be more at risk from weakened bones and osteoporosis if you don't get much exercise or you've taken long courses of steroids.

If you regularly use a wheelchair, a physiotherapist might suggest you stand for a few minutes at regular times through the day, perhaps supported by a frame for balance. This is 'weight-bearing exercise' and can help prevent osteoporosis. There are also exercises done sitting down that can help. Ask your physiotherapist which exercises are right for you.

Mood and wellbeing

Exercise can help with your mood and emotional wellbeing too. For instance, with managing stress and getting a better night's sleep.

We've got lots more about stress, mood and sleep on our website, including our sleep podcast series.

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. And what you want might change. Whatever you choose, don't do more than feels right for you.

Ideas

Here's a short list to inspire you – but of course there are lots more options out there:

Using weights or resistance bands

Gardening

Cardio (aerobic exercise) like cycling, hand cycling, running or rowing

Dancing

Swimming or aqua aerobics

Stretching – on it's own, or with yoga, Pilates, tai chi, or a ballet barre class

Boccia, curling and bowls

Martial arts

Archery

Horse riding

Sailing

On our website you'll find stories from other people with MS about the activities they enjoy.

Here's a bit more about different kinds of exercises:

- **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 or sand for weight.

- **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 or just 'cardio'.

  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 a high shelf 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 your left hand to your left knee and right hand to right knee, pushing them clockwise and anti-clockwise 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 a 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. Aqua aerobics (water aerobics) classes are offered at lots of sports centres. Water supports your body and reduces your risk of falls. There's also less stress placed on your joints and muscles. Strengthening, stretching and aerobic exercise can be done in a pool. Tailor the activities to what you need.

  Some people who are sensitive to heat find it good to exercise in cool water. Other people find a warm pool is good for them. Some local pools offer a 'warm water day' each week and also have special sessions for people with disabilities.

A good balance

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 or adjust what you do already. You might want to work with a physiotherapist to find specific exercises that

benefit you. No matter what your ability, there's a huge range of sports and activities available.

Complementary therapies

You can find out more about complementary therapies, including tai chi, pilates and yoga, on our website.

It doesn't have to be sport

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.

Online inspiration

If you can't exercise outside your home, or don't want to, exercise websites offer workouts to do at your own pace.

Our website has a range of exercise videos you can follow along to – whether you do them standing, sitting or lying down.
mssociety.org.uk/staying-active

You might also find computer games that make movement fun at home. Like Wii Fit, for example.

"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 real athletes, that they're not being patronised just because they're differently able."

Fugazi29

Yoga

Yoga could help with symptoms including fatigue, pain, balance, walking and coordination.

Your local MS Society group might arrange or know about yoga classes or teachers that could suit you. We've also got yoga videos on our website to follow along to.

Before starting yoga, consult your GP or your physiotherapist. Start with easy poses and slowly try more challenging ones. You could try seated versions from a wheelchair or a firm chair with a solid back.

In a class, ask for help if you can't move through a yoga pose on your own. Our online videos explain different ways to adapt the movements.

mssociety.org.uk/yoga

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, these need to be taken into account with your exercise plans. For example, if you have asthma, a heart condition or osteoporosis (which weakens bones).

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 getting tight and stiff, do some stretching as a 'cool-down' afterwards.

Adapting to MS symptoms

Your MS symptoms might influence the exercise you choose.

But MS doesn't mean you have to stop doing activities and exercise. For example, if you have vision problems you might choose 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 might 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.

If you use sports centres, exercise classes or personal trainers at gyms, think about any adjustments you need them 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 know 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

Lots of people with MS are sensitive to heat – though not everyone is. Some feel affected by humidity 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.

Symptoms fade away after your body cools down again. These temporary changes shouldn't be a reason not to exercise.

This effect from heat is known as Uhthoff's phenomenon. It probably happens because heat makes it harder for your body to pass messages between your brain and the rest of your body.

Some people adjust the exercise they choose to be sure they're safe even if symptoms happen. 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 helps 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 if you cool your body with ice, cold packs, cooling garments or cold water. 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. 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 improve your movement and other functions of the body. Helping you stay active is one of the key ways they do this.

So if MS is affecting sports or activities you like to do, they might suggest ways to adapt them, or new things to try.

MS symptoms

Physiotherapy is recommended to help with lots of MS symptoms - that's in the NICE guidelines on how MS should be treated in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This includes walking difficulties, muscle spasms and stiffness, swallowing difficulties and muscle weakness.

A physiotherapist could also help you with fatigue, bladder problems and pain.

Standards for care in Scotland also include access to physiotherapy.

If appropriate, a physiotherapist might work hands-on with you. For example, holding and moving your arms or legs for passive stretching and range-of-motion exercise.

Sports equipment and aids

Sometimes, sports equipment and aids could help - maybe suggested by a physiotherapist.

For example, exercise bikes and rowing machines can offer quite

strenuous activity in a controlled environment. That can be useful if your vision, coordination or balance problems make outdoor exercise difficult.

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

Trekking poles and walking sticks can help you stay balanced if you go walking.

A standing frame can help with weight-bearing activity. And weights strapped around your wrists or ankles might help strengthen your arms or legs.

How do I get physiotherapy?

Access to a physiotherapist varies from place to place.

Your GP, neurologist or MS nurse can refer you to a physiotherapist. In some areas you can refer yourself, and your MS team should be able to tell you if that's the case.

Usually you'll need to go to a hospital for physiotherapy appointments. But they might visit you at home if your symptoms mean you can't get to the hospital.

How will it work?

You might not get ongoing treatment on the NHS. It's more likely you'll be given a limited number of sessions.

A physiotherapist will sometimes teach you exercises you can do between appointments. Sometimes that could be 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. Then you can agree changes to make sure it's working for you.

Neurological rehabilitation

Some areas have MS or 'neurological rehabilitation' teams. They can include physiotherapists who specialise in neurological conditions including MS - called

neuro-physiotherapists. So it's always worth asking your GP, neurologist or MS nurse if there's a team they can refer you to.

You might also be able to get physiotherapy at non-specialist rehabilitation clinics.

Local groups

Your local MS Society group might organise physiotherapy sessions. FInd your nearby groups on our website or call us on the MS Help Hub.

Some MS Therapy Centres have physiotherapy clinics. Contact the Neuro Therapy Network (page 41) for one near you.

Paying for physiotherapy

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 (page 40).

"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."

Lynsey, physiotherapist

SSCCO
NYC
SSCCO
NYC

Exercise for specific MS symptoms

As well as improving your general health, exercise and physiotherapy could help with specific MS symptoms.

A physiotherapist can help you find the most effective level and style of exercise for your symptoms.

Fatigue

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.

And different kinds of exercise could help with fatigue, including aerobic, resistance, yoga and Pilates.

You can read more about managing fatigue on our website, including our free online fatigue management course.

Balance and walking difficulties

People with MS often find balance is a problem. There can be a number of reasons. Balance can be upset by changes in sensation, vision problems and MS-related damage in the brain or spinal cord. This can cause problems with walking. So can loss of strength in the legs, muscle stiffness or spasms.

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

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

Some people feel that balance and breath exercises help control their walking and balance. For example with yoga, tai chi or Pilates. Research suggests tai chi might help with balance, leg strength and walking.

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 aerobic exercise might also help with balance.

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

There's more about balance and mobility on our website or from our MS Help Hub.

"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

Muscle spasms and stiffness

Physiotherapy, including stretching and range-of-motion exercises, can help treat and manage muscle spasms and stiffness. 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.

There's some research that yoga and tai chi can help with flexibility. And some people find Pilates helps.

You can find out more about managing muscle spasms and stiffness from our website or our MS Help Hub.

Bladder and bowel problems

Strengthening the muscles that support your bladder or pelvic floor could help with some bladder problems caused by MS.

A continence adviser, MS nurse or physiotherapist can help with pelvic floor exercises to do this.

Keeping physically active may help with bowel control too.

We've got more about managing bladder and bowel problems on our website, or call our MS Help Hub.

Low mood, anxiety and depression

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

Research tells us regular exercise helps relieve mild to moderate depression. And group activities like tai chi offer social and emotional support. Exercise can be a good way to meet new people.

There's more about mental health, MS and emotions on our website, or call our MS Help Hub.

"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

"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

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. They can also advise on adaptations to make your daily life easier.

An OT looks at all aspects of daily life. They 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
- advise on grants for adaptations
- help your employers 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.

You can also find occupational therapists through the Royal College of Occupational Therapists website **rcot.co.uk**

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. Look for what's right for you – things you enjoy doing, suit your lifestyle and match your physical needs.

Ask yourself:

- When are the best times for me to exercise? Symptoms and drug side effects might 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, including 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 might 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 get benefits such as PIP (Personal Independence Payment) or Adult Disability Payment (in Scotland).

In some areas, doctors prescribe exercise – for instance through the NHS Exercise Referral Sheme. That might arrange for you to exercise for free at a local fitness centre.

Some gyms have signed up to being more accessible through the Inclusive Fitness Initiative. You can find a local gym that's registered at **activityalliance.org.uk/get-active/inclusive-gyms**

Most of these are in England. Whether registered or not, it's always worth asking a gym how they're set up and trying them out before committing – to help decide if they're right for you.

If your MS symptoms change, you might 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.

Listen to your body. It's important to be realistic. An unrealistic exercise plan can be frustrating and energy-sapping and make motivation harder.

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

Our website has a range of exercise videos, from gentle stretching to more vigorous workouts. They're designed for everyone with MS, and you can follow along sitting down or standing. They're all available for free on our website.

And on page 40 of this booklet you'll find details of other organisations to help you find exercise and activities that are right for you.

"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 staying active helps you manage other areas in your life. For example, 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 might 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 by week six you're up to 30 minutes twice a week.

The workout log on page 34 can help 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 might be able to help.

A physiotherapist will likely use an online planner like **physiotools.com** to create an exercise programme tailored to your rehabilitation and fitness.

There are loads of handy resources to help you plan your activities on a computer or smartphone, like:

mapometer.com

freetrainers.com – free customised exercise workout plans

myfitnesspal.com – a food and exercise tracker.

Some smartphone apps link to fitness trackers and smart watches to give you even more data about your fitness goals.

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

And they often have a blog or user forum to 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.

Lots of people find it easier to stick to a plan or routine when there are other people involved – like friends or family.

We have online and in-person activities in many areas you could try. Find out what's on at **mssociety.org.uk/local-support**

Or ask our MS Help Hub about 'Moving More with MS' to get more support and information.

Workout Log

Activity	Time	Distance
Week 1:		
Monday		
Wednesday		
Friday		
Week 2:		
Monday		
Wednesday		
Friday		
Week 3:		
Monday		
Wednesday		
Friday		
Week 4:		
Monday		
Wednesday		
Friday		
Week 5:		
Monday		
Wednesday		
Friday		
Week 6:		
Monday		
Wednesday		
Friday		

Sets	Reps	Weight

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 for managing your symptoms and limiting 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 getting painful and deconditioned through lack of use.

If passive stretching and range-of-motion exercises are helpful, perhaps family and carers can help with this between 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 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. This makes it easier for you to move from one position to another, such as using the toilet, or getting into bed.

So a physiotherapist might suggest strengthening exercises. These can work alongside stretching and range-of-motion exercises.

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.

Useful organisations

Brain & Spine Foundation

Includes a factsheet on exercises to help with dizziness and vertigo.

020 7793 5900

brainandspine.org.uk

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

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

020 730 666 66

csp.org.uk

College of Occupational Therapists

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

020 3141 4600

COT.org.uk

NHS

The NHS has lots about healthy living.

nhs.uk/livewell

Get a life, get active (N.Ireland)

getalifegetactive.com

National disability sports organisations

These organisations can help you find sports near you:

Activity Alliance

(used to be called the **English Federation of Disability Sport**)

0808 175 6991

activityalliance.org.uk

Disability Sports NI

028 9046 9925

Textphone **028 9046 3494**

dsni.co.uk

Scottish Disability Sport

0131 317 1130

scottishdisabilitysport.com

Disability Sport Wales
0845 846 0021
or 07918 716 316
disabilitysportwales.com

Neuro Therapy Network

(used to be called the **Multiple Sclerosis National Therapy Centres**)
They offer a variety of therapies in centres around the UK. Some centres offer physiotherapy and water-based exercise.
neurotherapynetwork.org.uk

Swim England

In summer 2024 they'll publish a factsheet with helpful tips for people with MS and Parkinson's who want to swim.
swimming.org

Thrive

Thrive helps people with a disability to start or continue gardening.
0118 988 5688
thrive.org.uk

We Are Undefeatable

We're supporting this campaign to help people with MS and other health conditions get active. Their website includes five minute workouts and how to find new activities where you are.
weareundefeatable.co.uk

Wheelpower

Provides opportunities throughout the year to introduce people to wheelchair sport.
01296 39 59 95
wheelpower.org.uk

Further information

MS Help Hub

Through our MS Help Hub anyone affected by MS can get emotional support and information, and access services including:

- MS nurses
- MS benefits adviser
- MS legal adviser
- Moving More with MS service
- Short breaks service

We can give information in different languages through an interpreter service. And by text relay and British Sign Language interpreters.

Find out more about all our services on our website.

Call **0808 800 8000** (Mon-Fri 9am to 5pm except bank holidays)

Email **helphub@mssociety.org.uk** or get in touch with webchat at **mssociety.org.uk**

Resources

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

You can read them online or download at **mssociety.org.uk/publications**

And you can order printed resources from **onlineshop.mssociety.org.uk** or call **0300 500 8084** and select option 4

Discover our national, local and online support

There's lots of different support avaialble around the UK and online. Find out more at **mssociety.org.uk/local** or give us a call on the MS Help Hub.

About this resource

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

We'd love to hear what you think about this information **mssociety.org.uk/yourviews**

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. Seek advice from the sources listed.

References

Email us if you'd like to know the references for this information at **supportercare@mssociety.org.uk**

Photography

Credit for photography belongs to Robert Moane (front cover), Amit Lennon (p6, p11, p22, p29, p39) and Simon Rawles (p27, p33)

This resource is also available in large print.

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

Contact us

MS Help Hub

Freephone 0808 800 8000
(weekdays 9am-5pm)
helphub@mssociety.org.uk
Webchat at mssociety.org.uk

MS National Centre

020 8438 0700
supportercare@mssociety.org.uk

Online

mssociety.org.uk

Facebook	/MSSociety
X	@mssocietyuk
Instagram	/mssocietyuk
TikTok	mssocietyuk

MS Society Scotland

0131 335 4050
enquiries-scotland@mssociety.org.uk

MS Society Northern Ireland

028 9080 2802
nireception@mssociety.org.uk

MS Society Cymru

020 8438 0700
mscymru@mssociety.org.uk

Trusted Information Creator
Patient Information Forum

BK21 © MS Society. July 2024 (a)

This title will be reviewed within three years of publication.

Multiple Sclerosis Society. Registered charity nos 1139257/SC041990.
Registered as a limited company in England and Wales 07451571.

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR