Posture and movement –
an introduction

This factsheet is for anyone who has MS or who assists or supports someone with MS. You might be the partner, family member or friend. In these factsheets, we refer to anyone who helps with the posture or movement of someone with MS as a ‘carer’. Professional care staff might also find aspects of this factsheet useful.

This introduction factsheet should be used in conjunction with other MS Society Posture and Movement Factsheets.

Reviewed and edited by neuro-physiotherapists, these factsheets aim to help people make the most of their physical abilities and move safely while maintaining as much independence as possible. They also recommend ways to maintain good posture – the essential foundation for good movement. Good posture can help avoid aches and pains, and pressure sores. For some people, improving posture helps control muscle spasms and stiffness.

There’s a lot of detail we just can’t cover. Only the key points and principles specifically applicable to people with MS are covered in these factsheets.

They are not intended to be a comprehensive guide to moving and handling as this is covered by other publications detailed in the reference list below.

They are also not a substitute for guidance given by physiotherapists and other health or social care professionals who will carry out individual assessments.

If you are having difficulties with movement or posture, we strongly recommend that you request an assessment, by contacting your MS nurse, GP or any health or social care professional.
General advice for carers helping people with MS to move

This information is general, but important for anyone who helps with the movement or posture of someone with MS.

Giving the right assistance to someone with MS can give them the opportunity to maintain or improve their abilities – by reducing physical effort and allowing them to move in as normal a way as possible. The wrong kind of help, however well-meaning, can cause more difficulties in the long run.

For example, someone with balance problems who is pulled up to standing each time they get up from a chair will tend to lean back on the person assisting them. This can mean they lose their sense of balance even further, as well as putting a strain on their carer’s back. On the other hand, if a more suitable method of assisting someone to stand is found, the person with MS may actually improve their balance and, therefore, increase their independence.

The Posture and Movement Factsheet Moving well with MS suggests ways to help someone stand up.

What causes problems with movement?

Changes in the brain and spinal cord caused by MS may directly affect the muscles anywhere in the body. This can cause problems with posture, balance and movement. People can also develop secondary problems, due to inactivity. This can lead to further weakness and stiffness, which is sometimes painful.

As well as this, when someone repeatedly sits or moves in a particular way, the brain and muscles adapt to this pattern, which can then become difficult to change.

Enabling independence – information for carers

A lack of activity and moving in the wrong way (or with excessive effort) can all make problems worse. So it’s important that, as a carer, you give the right amount of assistance at the right time. It’s also important that you move at the speed which gives the person the best opportunity to join in and move themselves as much as they are able.

For example, someone who needs a little help to get started might, once moving, manage independently. Sometimes the person may just need a steadying hand if they lose their balance, so the most helpful approach is to stay close, with your hands free.
### Good communication

As with so many things, good communication is vital. Both the carer and person with MS need to know what movement will happen, and when. This is especially important if there are memory or concentration difficulties involved. Always be clear about when the movement will start – perhaps by counting to three or saying ‘ready, steady, go’. Some people find it helpful to have visual information displayed to help get into a routine, so the same procedure is followed every time.

### More tips for carers

Consider also where you are going to place your hands. In particular, avoid pulling on the arms as the shoulders can be very vulnerable to injury where there is muscle weakness.

Before helping someone to move, discuss with them whether they feel up to it. If it is a bad day or time, think about whether you could use a different method or avoid the move altogether.

### Your own health

You must always be aware of your own health – if you injure your back, you may not be able to help at all.

### Key pointers for helping people to move

Prepare the area so there is enough space around you.

Wear shoes with good grip and clothes that are not too restrictive.

Adapt according to the person’s abilities on the day.

Ensure you both know the planned movement so you work as a team.

Count in the start of the movement – ‘ready, steady, go’.

Keep your back straight, bend at the knees and avoid twisting.

Use your body weight to provide power to avoid strain on your back.

Keep your head up when carrying out a manoeuvre - this promotes good posture.

Avoid giving more assistance than the person needs, and move at the speed which allows the person to join in.

Position your hands carefully to avoid damage or discomfort to the skin.

Avoid pulling on the arms or under the shoulder.
Further copies of this factsheet or other MS Society information can be downloaded from www.mssociety.org.uk/publications.

If you don’t have access to a printer and would like a printed version of this Factsheet, or any other MS Society publication or DVD, call the Information Team on 020 8438 0799 (weekdays, 9am-4pm) or email infoteam@mssociety.org.uk.

Other useful MS Society publications:

- Caring for someone with MS – a handbook for family and friends
- MS in your life – a guide for young carers
- Caring for people with MS in the community – a DVD and handbook aimed at health and social care staff. It covers general issues about MS, rather than moving handling.
- MS Essentials 21 Exercise and physiotherapy
- MS Essentials 19 Muscle spasms and stiffness
- MS Essentials 17 Pain and sensory symptoms
- MS Essentials 27 Adaptations and your home

MS Helpline
The MS Helpline offers confidential emotional support and information to anyone affected by MS, including family, friends, carers, newly diagnosed or those who have lived with the condition for many years. Calls can be made in over 150 different languages, via an interpreter. Call freephone 0808 800 8000 Monday to Friday, 9am-9pm, except bank holidays, or email helpline@mssociety.org.uk.
Other useful sources of information

**Back Care**
A national organisation which produces a range of information on back pain and posture, as well as large, detailed books aimed at health care professionals (such as the two mentioned below):

*Safer handling of people in the community* £6.00

*A Carer’s guide to safer moving and handling of patients* £3.00

*The guide to the handling of people* £40

[www.backpain.org](http://www.backpain.org) or call 0208 977 5474

**The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy**
The professional body for physiotherapists in the UK. Produces information aimed at health care professionals, including:

*Guidance on manual handling in physiotherapy* £10

[www.csp.org.uk](http://www.csp.org.uk) or call 0207 306 6666

**Disabled Living Centres (Assist UK)**
Disability Living Centres are found across the country. They give a chance to try out aids to independent living before deciding to buy. To find your nearest centre:

[www.assist-uk.org](http://www.assist-uk.org) or call 0870 770 2866

**Disabled Living Foundation (DLF)**
Specialising in information about independent living, the DLF produces a number of very helpful information leaflets, giving advice on choosing and obtaining equipment such as walking aids, wheelchairs, scooters and hoists.

[www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk) or call 0845 130 9177

**The Health and Safety Executive**
This Government department produces various publications about moving, though mainly aimed at moving objects in the workplace.

[www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)
Mobility centres
The Forum of Mobility Centres is a group of independent centres around the county. They offer information, advice and assessment for vehicles for disabled people. To find your nearest centre:

www.mobility-centres.org.uk or call 0800 559 3636

MS Trust
A national MS charity, which produces information for people affected by MS and professionals, including:

Falls - managing the ups and downs of MS

Are you sitting comfortably? A self help guide to good posture in sitting

www.mstrust.org.uk or call 01462 476700

Authors and contributors
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. The law and government regulations may change. Be sure to seek local advice from the sources listed.

Suggestions for improvement in future editions are welcomed. Please send them to infoteam@mssociety.org.uk

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