

Posture and movement 1:

An introduction

Posture is the way you position your body when you're standing up, or sitting down. And good posture is the foundation for good movement. When you have MS you might find that keeping a good posture is quite difficult when symptoms, like fatigue and balance, might get in the way. Good posture can help you to avoid aches and pains, and pressure sores. For some people, improving posture helps control muscle spasms and stiffness. The information in this factsheet will recommend ways for you to maintain good posture. So you can make the most of your physical abilities, move safely and be as independent as possible.

What causes problems with movement?

Changes in your brain and spinal cord caused by MS may directly affect the muscles anywhere in your body. This can cause problems with posture, balance and movement. You can develop even more problems because you're not active. This can lead you to feel weak and stiff, 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

Being less active and moving in the wrong way (or with too much 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 on their own. 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.

General advice for carers helping people with MS to move

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're having difficulties moving or with your posture, we strongly recommend that you ask for

an assessment. Contact your MS nurse, GP or any health or social care professional.

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

If you have MS, getting the right kind of help can give you the chance to maintain or improve your abilities – by taking away some of the physical effort and allowing you to move in as normal a way as possible. The wrong kind of help, however well-meaning, can cause more problems 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 helping 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 better way of helping someone to stand is found, the person with MS may actually improve their balance and, therefore, increase their independence.

The factsheet 'Posture and movement 2: Moving well with MS' suggests ways to help someone stand up.

Good communication

As with so many things, good communication is very important. Both the carer and person with MS need to know what movement will happen, and when. This is very important if you have memory or concentration difficulties. Always be clear about when the movement will start – perhaps by counting to three or saying 'ready, steady, go'. You might find it helpful to have information you can see, to help you get into a routine, with doing things the same way every time.

More tips for carers

Think about where you're going to place your hands. Try not to pull the arms as the shoulders can be very sensitive to injury where there's muscle weakness.

Before helping someone to move, ask them if they feel up to it. If it's a bad day or time, think about doing something different or avoid the move altogether.

Your own health

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

- Make sure you both know the planned movement so you work as a team
- Prepare the area so there's enough space around you
- Wear shoes with good grip and clothes that aren't too tight
- Move according to your abilities on the day
- Make sure 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
- Try not to give 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
- Try not to pull the arms or under the shoulder

Back Care

Produces a range of information sheets and more detailed books about posture, movement and handling

0208 977 5474

backcare.org.uk

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

The professional body for physiotherapists in the UK

0207 306 6666

csp.org.uk

Disabled Living

Provides impartial information and advice about products, equipment (assistive technology) and services for disabled adults, children, older people, carers and the professionals who support them

0161 607 8200

disabledliving.co.uk

Disabled Living Foundation (DLF)

Specialising in information about independent living, the DLF produces a number of very helpful information leaflets. These give advice on choosing and obtaining equipment such as walking aids, wheelchairs, scooters and hoists

0845 130 9177

dlf.org.uk

The Health and Safety Executive

This Government department produces various publications about moving, though mainly aimed at moving objects in the workplace

hse.gov.uk

Mobility centres

The Forum of Mobility Centres is a group of independent centres around the country. They offer information, advice and assessment for vehicles for disabled people

0800 559 3636

mobility-centres.org.uk

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’

0800 032 3839

mstrust.org.uk

RICA (formerly Ricability)

An independent research charity that publishes free, unbiased consumer information for older and disabled

020 7427 2460

rica.org.uk

Scope

Scope exists to make this country a place where disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else

0808 800 3333

scope.org.uk

We're the MS Society. Our community is here for you through the highs, lows and everything in between. We understand what life's like with MS.

Together, we are strong enough to stop MS.

The MS Society provides this information free of charge but if you would like to help cover the cost, which will help towards our essential work, please call **0800 100 133** or visit the fundraising section of our website to make a donation. Anything you can give will be greatly appreciated.

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