Moving more with MS
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.

We rely on the generosity of people like you to fund our vital work. If you would 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: [mssociety.org.uk/donate](http://mssociety.org.uk/donate)
- Posting your donation to: MS Society, National Centre, 372 Edgware Road, London NW2 6ND. Please make cheques payable to the ‘MS Society.’
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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 a 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, which will help you stick to your routine.

3. The right exercise or 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 referral.

5. Keeping track of your exercise and activities lets you see and manage how you’re coming along. Set goals and join a support group. Try using an app or activity tracker to help you with this.
Everyone benefits from being active, including people with MS. However, your MS affects you, there are exercises that can help you to stay as healthy and active as possible and to improve your symptoms and how they make you feel.

It’s not always easy to find the time, but regular activity or exercise will keep your body working at its best. To make it easier, it’s important to find exercise or an activity that suits you – something you enjoy and find worthwhile. MS affects each person differently and you will have your own likes and dislikes.

You might enjoy sports, while someone else may prefer Tai Chi or yoga. All kinds of movement can be good for you. Even while gardening, cleaning and walking the kids to school you use your muscles and it helps you to stay active.

Physiotherapy can also be very useful. Physiotherapists can help you find exercises to meet your specific needs and abilities. They may suggest exercises that focus on a particular area of your body that you wish to improve, or help you manage a specific effect of your MS.

However, MS affects you, the right activity can make a difference to managing and living with your condition.

“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
Why should I stay active?

It’s not only exercise that helps you get active and keep active. Activities like walking, gardening or even housework can help your body and mind stay as healthy as possible. This is true for people with MS who have milder symptoms and for those whose MS is more severe. And there’s no evidence that exercise makes MS worse in the long term, or that exercising causes relapses.

Avoiding the knock-on effects of MS

Loss of muscle strength and fitness

Deconditioning happens when a muscle isn’t used for a long time and loses strength and may be painful. This could make any of your mobility or strength problems worse. These problems are symptoms of MS, so they can’t always be avoided. But by finding the right exercises for you, perhaps with the help of a physiotherapist, you can stop problems getting worse.

Weight gain or loss

It’s important to keep a healthy weight. But many people with MS see their weight change. Exercise can help you control your weight, especially when combined with a healthy, well-balanced diet. Ask your GP to refer you to a dietician to help with any weight issues you might have.

“Doing exercises every day is important. I do a simple balance exercise every day. Just spend two to three minutes looking up and down and over each shoulder. I have been doing this every morning for six months. Slowly but steadily my balance has improved and consequently I feel more confident moving around.”

Patrick
Weakened bones, including osteoporosis, may put you at risk if you don’t get much exercise or have taken long courses of steroids. Gentle activity strengthens your bones and can help prevent these problems developing.

For example, if you regularly use a wheelchair, a physiotherapist may suggest you stand for a few minutes at regular intervals through the day, perhaps supported by a frame for balance. This is known as weight-bearing exercise and can help prevent osteoporosis. There are also exercises that can be done sitting down that can help. Ask your physiotherapist which exercises are right for you.

Fact

Research tells us that exercise:

- improves the overall health of people with milder MS
- helps people with more severe MS to stay as mobile and active as possible
- improves walking mobility in people with MS
- reduces disease activity in children with MS
- helps some people manage their MS symptoms
- decreases the risk of heart disease
- improves mood

Osteoporosis

Weakened bones, including osteoporosis, may put you at risk if you don’t get much exercise or have taken long courses of steroids. Gentle activity strengthens your bones and can help prevent these problems developing.

For example, if you regularly use a wheelchair, a physiotherapist
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. What you want from an exercise or activity plan might change over time. Whatever exercise or activity you choose, don’t do more than feels right for you.

The exercises listed below help your body keep active in different ways.

- **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 for weight or sand.

- **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. 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’re able to do, exercise at any level is better than none at all.

- **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 high shelving at home or try to bend forward and touch your toes.

- **Range of motion** 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 left hand to left knee and right hand to right knee and pushing them clockwise and anticlockwise 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 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 the muscles and bones in your body. 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 when sitting down.

- **Water-based exercise.** Water can be a good environment for many exercises – not only swimming – and aquarobics (water aerobics) classes are offered at lots of sports centres. Water supports your body and reduces your risk of falls, and there’s also less stress placed on your joints and muscles. Strengthening, stretching and aerobic exercise can all be done in a pool, and you can tailor activities to your own needs. Some people who are sensitive to heat also find it good to exercise in cool water. Others may even find that a warm pool is good for them. As with any exercise, you need to find the right environment for you. Some local pools offer a ‘warm water day’ each week and have special sessions for people with disabilities.
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, adjust what you do already, or work with a physiotherapist to discover specific exercises that could benefit you. No matter what your ability is, there’s a huge range of sports and activities available to you.

For information about complementary therapies such as Tai Chi, Pilates and yoga, see our booklet on ‘Complementary and alternative medicine (CAMs)’.

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.

If you can’t or don’t want to join a gym or exercise outside, there are a number of online exercise websites which offer downloadable and streamed workouts for you to do at your own pace. There are a number of MS-specific exercise DVDs that have routines you can follow at home. See ‘Further reading’ for more information. There are also a number of virtual reality computer games which can be played at home and can help you keep moving, for example Wii Fit.

“MS may have good and bad days, but if martial arts is something you never thought you would be able to do, well think again! I gladly accepted an invitation to attend the annual Disability Karate Foundation event. My favorite part of the day was how the competitors were treated like the real athletes that they are not being patronised just because that they are differently able.”

Fugazi29
A recent university study found that women with moderate symptoms of multiple sclerosis experienced improvements in balance, walking, coordination, and quality of life after eight weeks of practising yoga.

If you have MS, you can try these five poses to start a home practice or contact your local MS Society branch to find a class, teacher, or video based on your location and symptoms.

Before starting a yoga practice, consult your GP and/or your physiotherapist. Start with easy poses and slowly try more challenging ones. You can try seated versions from a wheelchair or a firm chair with a solid back. Ask for help when you’re unable to move through a yoga pose on your own.
Do I need to take precautions because of my MS?

There are safety measures that everyone should take when exercising and, 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 are thinking of doing more than you normally would, you should speak to your GP beforehand. Your GP might ask you to see a physiotherapist. Just like anyone else, if you have other health issues, such as asthma, a heart condition or osteoporosis, these need to be taken into account with your exercise plans.

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 will 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, you should always warm up, with 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 becoming tight and stiff, stretching should also be done as a ‘cool-down’ afterwards.

Adapting to MS symptoms
Your MS symptoms may influence the exercise you choose to do, but having MS doesn’t mean that you automatically need to stop doing activities and exercise you enjoy.
For example, if you have vision problems you might choose other forms of exercise or adapted sports where eyesight is not 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’) and may find it useful to have written notes and diagrams from a physiotherapist or trainer.

A family member or carer might also be able to learn the exercises with you to help remember them accurately.

You may want to use sports centres, exercise classes or personal trainers at gyms. If you do, consider any adjustments you might need the centre or trainer 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? The local branch of the MS Society might be aware of 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 pins 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

Many people with MS – though not all – are sensitive to heat. Some people also say that humidity can affect them too.

Illness or infection, hot weather and exercise can all raise your body’s temperature, which can make your MS symptoms feel temporarily worse or bring about fatigue, weakness or vision problems. This is known as ‘Uhthoff’s phenomenon’ and it probably happens in MS because
heat makes it harder for your body to exchange messages between your brain and the rest of your body. Symptoms fade away after your body cools down again and these temporary changes shouldn’t be a reason not to exercise.

Some people adjust the exercise they choose, to be sure they are safe even if symptoms occur. 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

- Drinking iced drinks, wearing a ‘cooling vest’ and taking a cool bath before exercising might help you avoid temporary symptoms and allow you to exercise for longer. ‘Cooling sprays’ can also provide temporary relief from hot conditions

- For some people, a cooling bath or shower after exercise can help 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 when you apply ice or cold packs directly to your skin, or when using cooling garments or cold water to cool your body. MS can cause changes to the way you experience temperature, changing the feeling that would normally tell you when something is too hot or too cold. You should take care not to damage your skin. Your GP, physiotherapist, occupational therapist or MS nurse can help make sure the cooling techniques you try don’t harm you.
How can a physiotherapist help?

When there’s a specific problem or ongoing symptoms that affect your day-to-day activities, mobility and independence, Physiotherapy can help. It 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 assess your physical difficulties and help you to improve your movement and other functions of the body. Helping you stay active is one of the key ways in which they do this. If MS is affecting the sports or activities you’re able to do, they might suggest new ways to stay active, or ways to adapt your preferred activities to suit your situation.

A physiotherapist can also suggest particular activities to treat and manage specific problems such as difficulties with mobility, balance, posture and fatigue. Bladder problems, pain and muscle spasms and stiffness can also be targeted by physiotherapy.

Where appropriate, physiotherapy might involve the physiotherapist working ‘hands-on’ with you. For example they may hold and move your limbs for passive stretching and range of motion.

**Sports equipment and aids**

Some people with MS benefit from using sports equipment and aids when exercising, and some of these may be suggested by a physiotherapist. For example, exercise bikes and rowing machines can offer quite strenuous activity in a controlled environment – which could be useful if vision, coordination or balance problems make these kinds of activities difficult outdoors.
“I learnt how to use the theraband at a stretch and tone class. It’s something that 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

A standing frame can be an aid to weight-bearing activity and weights strapped around the wrists or ankles might help strengthen your arms or legs.

Aids and equipment can also help compensate for difficulties with balance, muscle weakness or other symptoms. For example, trekking poles and walking sticks can help you keep balanced if you go walking.
If you have more strength in your arms than your legs, a hand-cycle might be an option – this is a bike powered by ‘pedals’ for the hands instead of the feet, and there are both indoor and outdoor versions.

**How do I get physiotherapy?**

Your GP, neurologist or MS nurse can refer you to a physiotherapist. You may also be able to refer yourself.

The guidelines on how MS should be treated in the NHS recommend physiotherapy to help with many symptoms of MS, including walking difficulties, muscle spasms and stiffness, swallowing difficulties and muscle weakness.

But access to a physiotherapist varies from place to place and you may not receive ongoing treatment on the NHS, but instead be given a limited number of sessions. For some, it might be offered following a relapse, for others it may be suggested when there’s a change in symptoms such as increased muscle stiffness or mobility problems.

A physiotherapist will sometimes teach you exercises that you can carry out between appointments, maybe 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. Changes can then be made to make the programme work for you.

Physiotherapy is mainly available as an ‘out-patient treatment’ – where you visit the hospital just for the treatment appointment and then leave again. But if fatigue, spasticity or other MS symptoms don’t allow you to travel to and from the local hospital, a physiotherapist may be able to visit you in your own home. Some areas also have MS or neurological ‘rehabilitation teams’ that include specialist neurophysiotherapists. It’s always worth asking your GP, neurologist or MS nurse if there’s a team in your area and if you can be referred to them.

Local access to physiotherapy is sometimes available at non-specialist rehabilitation clinics, or sessions may be organised by your local group of the MS Society. Your local MS Society can provide details of local physiotherapy services and groups.
Therapy Centre may also have physiotherapy clinics. Contact the National MS Therapy Centre for availability near you.

Physiotherapy is also available privately. If you’re thinking of paying for physiotherapy, registered therapists who specialise in neurology can be found through the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy. Their details can be found at the back of this booklet.

“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 have seen this work successfully with many patients who have relapsed over the years.”

Lynsey, physiotherapist
Exercise for specific MS symptoms

As well as improving your general health, exercise and physiotherapy may help with specific MS symptoms. A physiotherapist can help you find the most effective level and style of exercise for your symptoms.

Fatigue

One of the most common problems for people with MS is fatigue. It seems to almost go against common sense to exert yourself if you have fatigue. But exercise can bring improvements in strength, fitness and mood – all of which might help you to manage your fatigue. But, it’s important to balance exercise with rest and to keep cool while you exercise, especially if you find that getting hot during exercise makes your fatigue worse.

Good posture can also help your body to work more efficiently, causing less strain and using less energy. This too may help with managing fatigue. One clinical trial showed that yoga helped reduce some people’s levels of fatigue. Resistance exercise may also help.

For further information see our booklet on ‘Fatigue’.

Balance and walking difficulties

People with MS often find balance is a problem, and there can be a number of reasons for this. Changes in sensation, vision problems and MS-related damage in the brain or spinal cord can all upset someone’s balance. This can cause problems with walking, as can loss of strength in the legs, muscle stiffness or spasms.

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

Research suggests that the positive effects wear off quickly if the exercise programme is stopped. To maintain improvements, a physiotherapist might find exercises that you can continue between check-ups, either on your own or with the help of a member of family or carer.

“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

Some people feel that balance and breath exercises help control their walking and balance. Popular examples are yoga, Tai Chi and Pilates. Clinical trials have found some benefits from Tai Chi, including improved walking speed.

We don’t know which forms of exercise are the most effective. So, find one that works best for you, your condition and your lifestyle. One small study on the effects of Tai Chi training in people with MS who can walk found that it improved their balance, coordination, fatigue and depression. While it generally doesn’t cause people any serious problems, be careful not to strain joints or muscles when doing exercises like Tai Chi. Outdoor walking and aerobics may also help with balance.

See our booklet ‘Balance and MS’ for more information.

**Muscle spasms and stiffness**
Almost 50% of people with MS have muscle spasms and stiffness, though the effects are different from person to person. At least 20% of the people affected in this way will experience muscle spasm. Physiotherapy, including stretching and range-of-motion exercises, can help you treat and manage symptoms. 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.
Yoga may also improve your flexibility and you may feel less muscle stiffness. And research has found some benefits from Tai Chi exercise, including reduced muscle stiffness. Pilates may also help, although there’s been limited research in this area. A small study on people who did not have MS showed Pilates improved flexibility.

For more information see our booklet on ‘Muscle spasms and stiffness’.

**Bladder and bowel problems**

People with MS can experience a variety of bladder problems. Some people experience an urgent or very frequent need to go to the toilet – known as ‘urgency’ and ‘frequency’. Others find that exercising, sneezing or coughing causes leakage. This is called ‘stress incontinence’.

Strengthening the muscles that support your bladder or ‘pelvic floor’ – may help. A continence advisor, MS nurse or physiotherapist can help you with pelvic floor exercises.

Bowel problems are less common, but can be awkward and distressing. Keeping physically active may help your bowel control. One study found that people with MS had improvements in their bowel functions following a 15-week course of yoga.

For more information see our booklets on ‘Managing bladder problems’ and ‘Managing the bowel in MS’.

**Low mood, anxiety and depression**

MS can affect your emotions as well as your body. Exercise may help when you experience issues such as low mood, anxiety or depression. Research tells us that regular aerobic exercise helps relieve mild to moderate depression. Group activities like Tai Chi also prove to help in your social and emotional support. And, you may find that exercise is a good opportunity to meet new people.

For more information see our booklet on ‘MS and your Emotions’.
How can an occupational therapist help?

An occupational therapist (OT) can help you to do everyday activities you can’t do anymore because of your MS. An OT can suggest changes to your environment, help you to use special equipment and advise on different ways of doing a task or activity. Also, an OT can advise on adaptations to make your daily life easier.

An OT looks at all aspects of daily life, from the home to the school or workplace.

An occupational therapist 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
- help your employer(s) manage your return to work
- monitor your progress

To arrange an OT assessment, contact your local social services (social work in Scotland) department. Your GP can also make a referral for you.

They can also advise on grants that may be available for adaptations. There’s more information about adaptations in the MS Society booklet ‘Adaptations and your home’.

The professional body for occupational therapists working in a wide range of areas in the UK is the British Association of Occupational Therapy (BAOT). Their details can be found at the back of this booklet.
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. So, it’s important to find the right activities and exercises for you – ones that you enjoy doing, suit your lifestyle and match your physical needs.

When looking at different sports and activities, you might want to ask yourself the following questions:

- When are the best times for me to exercise? Symptoms and drug side effects may 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, such as 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 may be groups running cheaper classes in your area, perhaps linked to the MS Society local group. And 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 local sports centres have reduced rates if you receive
benefits such as Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment. In some areas, doctors prescribe exercise as well as medicines and arrange for you to exercise for free at a local fitness centre. There are many local initiatives called Inclusive Fitness Initiatives (IFI) that could help you to access fitness. Most of these are in England, although there are some in other areas of the UK. The IFI website has details of all accredited initiatives – contact details are at the end of this booklet.

If MS symptoms change, you may 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. But listen to your body – it’s important to be realistic. An unrealistic exercise plan can be frustrating and energy-sapping
and actually make it harder to stay motivated.

On the other hand, if you find something that works for you, it can be inspiring and energising.

- You can try and change your routine. If you take the bus, get off one stop earlier than you usually would. That way you can get more steps in.

- If you have a smart phone, you might want to invest in an app to track the exercise you do, steps you take and perhaps even the food you eat. Keeping an eye out for how much you move and how much you eat will help you to better manage your health.

- Also, these apps are usually linked to user forums or chat groups so you can share your experiences with like-minded people and motivate one another. This peer support might encourage you to stay on track if it doesn’t challenge you to do more!

“I am in a wheelchair and I do regular ‘press-ups’ where I lift my bum off the cushion to avoid pressure sores.”
Anonymous

You might find the MS Society Exercise DVD useful. It presents a range of simple, gentle exercises and stretches you might want to try. They are suitable for people with varying levels of ability.

For support on walking with your condition have a look at the Walking for health website on walkingforhealth.org.uk

Also, there are tips on gardening in a wheelchair available at carryongardening.org.uk
How do I stay motivated?

Even though symptoms of your MS may flare up, try to focus on how being and staying active helps you manage other areas in your life – like 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 decide 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 (starting you can walk 10 minutes and in 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 so 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 10 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 10 minutes). Try to do this for two weeks and see if you can increase both sessions each week with five minutes, so you’re up to 30 minutes twice a week by the time you reach week six.
See the workout log on pages 36 and 37 to help you to get started with 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 can also help you to set up a schedule.

They will most likely use the program physiotools.com and create an exercise program tailored to your rehabilitation and fitness.

Other online schedules to help you plan your activities are:

mapometer.com

freetrainers.com free customised exercise workout plans

myfitnesspal.com is a food and exercise tracker, also has more info on apps to use for your smartphone.

If you have a smartphone, you can also try using a sports’ app together with a fitness tracker. That’s an easy way to track your progress and your goals. Most fitness trackers measure your heart rate and amount of calories burned allowing you to monitor your weight as well. There’s often a blog or user forum to join so you can 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. Many people find it’s easier to stick to a plan or routine when there are other people, like friends and perhaps family involved.
## Workout Log

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<th>Activity</th>
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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. If you’re having a relapse you shouldn’t wait until your symptoms have ‘levelled out’ and you have finished any steroid treatment.

A physiotherapist can help you to maintain muscle tone and mobility after a relapse, and help 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 any changes in your symptoms, or if you notice any 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 a little more and exercise a little less – to save your energy for other tasks you may 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.

There could be reasons, other than your MS, that stop you from exercising. For example, if you catch a cold. It’s a good idea to rest and recover from being ill instead of pushing yourself too hard.

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 and 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 severe. Which exercise is right for me?

Exercise is good for you, also if you have high levels of disability. If your MS is quite severe, you might think of working with a physiotherapist to find exercises that are comfortable and meet your specific needs.

The physiotherapist will help you find exercises that help you manage your symptoms and limit the knock-on effects of MS.

Passive stretching and range of motion

These exercises can help with muscle stiffness. They can prevent your joints from ‘locking up’ and your muscles from becoming painful and deconditioned through lack of use.

If passive stretching and range-of-motion exercises are helpful, your family and carers might be able to help you with this in 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 are not 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 (social work in Scotland) ‘care package’. This means they will be seen as essential parts of the care you need, and should be provided.

Strength and posture

Having good posture can make a big difference to your comfort and health if you spend a lot of time sitting or lying down. You might find that muscle spasms and difficulties with swallowing trouble you less if you adjust your posture. Breath control can also be helped by an upright posture.
which allows the lungs and throat to open more easily.

Muscle strength is important for good posture, and, to make sure your muscles are strong, a physiotherapist may suggest strengthening exercises. These can work next to stretching and range of motion exercises. This makes it easier for you to move from one position to another. Examples of everyday activities are using the toilet, or getting into bed.

**Finding exercise in everyday activities**

Everyday tasks and movements can also provide useful exercise.

Housework such as:

- sweeping the kitchen floor
- wiping down a table top or
- reaching and stretching for things can all be good exercise

A physiotherapist, or occupational therapist, might ask you to make small changes to make sure you get the most from the activities you do. By changing the layout of things you have around you, for example, you may be able to create stretches for your arms. Keeping something that is 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 and get the benefits of regular stretching, strengthening and movement.
Further reading

The following books are all available to borrow from the MS Society library. Email librarian@mssociety.org.uk, call 020 8438 0900 or visit mssociety.org.uk/library

**MS Essentials Factsheets: Posture and movement.**
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.

**Physical activity for neurological conditions**
by Dr Helen Dawes. Published by Oxford Brookes University (2010). A handbook to help people with neurological conditions, including MS, to exercise more easily and safely. Includes advice on how to plan an exercise routine. Available on loan from the MS Society Library.

**Exercises for people with MS by Liz Betts.**
Published by the Multiple Sclerosis Trust (2004), ISBN: 1-904156-05-3. This book includes diagrams and explanations of exercises that can be done when lying down, sitting, kneeling or standing.
It also has tips on good posture. Available to download from the MS Trust website: mstrust.org.uk
Yoga tips for people with multiple sclerosis
Sue Lee. Published by Class Publishing, London (2009), ISBN 1859592287. Includes a series of straightforward yoga exercises and breathing techniques to benefit people with MS, aimed at helping to ease and manage problems such as muscle stiffness and spasticity.

Stretching for people with MS.
An illustrated manual by Beth E. Gibson. Published by the National MS Society (2007). Diagrams and descriptions of exercises that you can do alone. This booklet is available to download from the website of the American MS society, nationalmssociety.org

Stretching with a helper for people with MS.
An illustrated manual by Beth E. Gibson. Published by the National MS Society (2007). Diagrams and descriptions show a range of exercises including passive stretching and range-of-motion. This booklet is available to download from the website of the American MS society, nationalmssociety.org
New words explained

**Aerobic exercise** – also called cardio, strengthens your heart and lungs, and improves the way your body uses oxygen. Walking, cycling and dancing are all examples of aerobic exercise.

**Deconditioning** – When a muscle is not used for long periods and loses strength and becomes painful.

**Cardiovascular exercise** – see aerobic exercise

**Cognitive problems** – we use the term cognitive when we’re talking about your mind. Examples of cognitive problems are difficulties with learning, memory, perception, and problem solving.

**Complementary therapies** – are used alongside, or in addition to, conventional medical treatments. People use them to boost their physical or emotional health. Or to relieve symptoms or side effects. Tai Chi and Yoga are examples of complementary therapies.

**Neurological rehabilitation** – we talk about neurological rehabilitation when we want to describe how this therapy can help reduce pain, balance and coordination, and help to restore your range of movement and motion. These are symptoms you might have as a result of the effect your MS has on your nervous system. Some of these symptoms might also include blurred vision, difficulty walking, weak muscles and fatigue.

**Osteoporosis** – we use the term osteoporosis when your bones are weak and can break easily. Osteoporosis is usually discovered when you’ve had a fall or impact and your bones, such as your wrist or hip, fracture easily.
Physiotherapy – we use the term physiotherapy when we talk about help to restore movement and function when you’re affected by injury, illness or disability. A physiotherapist helps you to do this.

Rehabilitation – happens when a physiotherapist guides you to maintain muscle tone and mobility after you’ve had a relapse, and helps get you back into a routine as you recover.

Resistance exercise – is any form of exercise that makes your (skeletal) muscles contract (not the muscles of your heart, lungs). A resistance object (such as heavy weights, a stretch band or even your own body weight) is used to cause the contractions, and those contractions can lead to more and stronger muscles, endurance and tone.

(Scientific) evidence – we use the term evidence to describe when tests have been done to prove a (medical) claim does or doesn’t work. Usually, the larger the test, the more reliable the proof is. When we say there’s ‘little evidence’ we mean that there have been few tests and/or tests with a small number of persons.
Useful organisations

**Brain & Spine Foundation**
LG01, Lincoln House
Kennington Park
1-3 Brixton Road
London SW9 6DE
Telephone 020 7793 5900
brainandspine.org.uk

**Chartered Society of Physiotherapy**
The professional body for physiotherapists in the UK. They can provide details of registered physiotherapists who specialise in neurological conditions such as MS.
14 Bedford Row
London WC1R 4ED
Telephone 020 7306 6666
csp.org.uk

**College of Occupational Therapists**
The professional body for occupational therapy staff. They can provide details of registered occupational therapists.
106-114 Borough High Street
London SE1 1LB

**English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS)**
SportPark, Loughborough University, 3 Oakwood Drive, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 3QF
Telephone 01509 227750
efds.co.uk

**Disability Sports NI**
Adelaide House, Falcon Rd
Belfast BT12 6SJ
Telephone 028 9038 7062
Textphone 028 9038 7064
dsn.i.co.uk

**Scottish Disability Sport**
Caledonia House, South Gyle
Edinburgh EH12 9DQ
Telephone 0131 317 1130
scottishdisabilitysport.com

**Disability Sport Wales**
Sport Wales National Centre
Sophia Gardens
Cardiff CF11 9SW
Telephone 0845 846 0021
fdsw.org.uk
Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI)
Supports the fitness industry to become more inclusive, increasing participation by disabled people.
Telephone 01509 227750
efds.co.uk

Multiple Sclerosis National Therapy Centres
A federation of therapy centres around the UK. They offer a variety of therapies. Some centres offer physiotherapy clinics and water-based exercise.

PO Box 2199
Buckingham
MK18 8AR
Telephone 01296 711699
msntc.org

NHS
The Live Well section has information on all aspects of healthy living, including diet and nutrition.

nhs.uk/livewell

The following NHS websites help motivate and support you to make and stick to changes that will improve your health. They help you find local disability sports and classes.

Change4Life (England)
nhs.uk/change4life
Change4Life Wales (Wales)
change4lifewales.org.uk
Eat better feel better (Scotland)
eatbetterfeelbetter.co.uk
Get a life, get active (N.Ireland)
getalifegetactive.com

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

Wheelpower
Provides opportunities throughout the year to introduce people to wheelchair sport.

Stoke Mandeville Stadium
Guttmann Road
Stoke Mandeville
Buckinghamshire
HP21 9PP
Telephone 01296 395995
wheelpower.org.uk
Exercise DVDs and videos

All these DVDs and videos are available on loan from the MS Society library. Contact the librarian, email librarian@mssociety.org.uk or telephone 020 8438 0900

**Move it for MS! The fun way to exercise with Mr Motivator.**
Published by the MS Trust. (2007) A DVD of exercises developed by an MS physiotherapist in conjunction with Mr Motivator. Available from the MS Trust. Telephone 01462 476700 or go to mstrust.org.uk

**Pathways: exercise video for people with limited mobility.**
Produced on video and DVD by Mobility Limited (1993) in the USA. The video shows exercises that can be done alone or with a carer.

**Yoga with Sue Lee.** Four yoga routines (DVDs) designed to loosen the entire body and improve posture and breath. There are also a number of exercises online at yoga4pwms.co.uk


**Yoga for MS and related conditions** by S. Crotzer. Published by Pathways Notes Canada (1993). Exercise DVD for people with limited mobility.
Further information

Library
For more information, research articles and DVDs about MS contact our librarian.

020 8438 0900
librarian@mssociety.org.uk
mssociety.org.uk/library

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

020 8438 0999
shop@mssociety.org.uk
mssociety.org.uk/publications

MS Helpline
The freephone MS Helpline offers confidential emotional support and information for anyone affected by MS, including family, friends and carers.

Information is available in over 150 languages through an interpreter service.

0808 800 8000
(closed weekends and bank holidays)
helpline@mssociety.org.uk
About this resource

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

If you have any comments on this information, please send them to: resources@mssociety.org.uk or you can complete our short online survey at surveymonkey.com/s/MSresources

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. Availability and prescribing criteria for drugs in various parts of the UK may change. Seek advice from the sources listed.

References
A list of references is available on request, and all cited articles are available to borrow from the MS Society library (there may be a small charge).

Contact the librarian on 020 8438 0900, or visit mssociety.org.uk/library

Photography
Credit for photography belongs to Amit Lennon and Simon Rawles.

This resource is also available in large print.

Call 020 8438 0999 or email shop@mssociety.org.uk
Contact us

**MS Helpline**
Freephone 0808 800 8000
helpline@mssociety.org.uk

**MS National Centre**
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info@mssociety.org.uk
supportercare@mssociety.org.uk

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twitter.com/mssocietyuk

**MS Society Scotland**
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msscotland@mssociety.org.uk

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028 9080 2802
nireception@mssociety.org.uk

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mscymru@mssociety.org.uk

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