

How to Exercise when Exercising Hurts

You know you need to exercise. Maybe your doctor has told you, “You must start exercising!” You know how important it is, yet every time you try, you hurt. Maybe you hurt for a little while or maybe you hurt for days and you get discouraged from exercising at all. Exercise does help people in pain, but it needs to be the *right kind* and the *right amount* of exercise.

Some important things to remember:

1. Start slowly.

If you exercise too much, too hard or too fast you will feel worse and it will be harder to make yourself exercise the next time. If your body is in pain, fatigued or weak, it will respond best to a gentle, slow approach.

2. Believe in your ability to get better.

Wherever you are in terms of fitness level, you *can* increase balance, strength, muscle tone, endurance and range of motion if you work *with* your body rather than against it.

3. Treat your body like a good friend.

Exercise in a kind, enjoyable way. No bullying or forcing yourself!

4. Little bits count!

Start exercising in short segments, maybe even three to five minutes, and very gradually add time.

When I was very sick with chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, I had to rest after walking up a flight of steps. Exercising at first for me meant walking slowly around my yard. Today, I climb mountains, hike, dance, lift weights and lead a vibrantly active life.

5. Just notice. Trust what you notice.

You are the one who lives in your body. You are the one who can notice from the inside. When you notice and trust what you notice you become your own best teacher.

- Which activities and types of exercise make you feel better and which make you feel worse?
- What are the voices inside your head saying about exercising? Which voices are helpful and which ones are not?

Let your inner noticing, and your trust of yourself, guide you toward **your** best exercise.

7. Breathe!

- Move with the breath flowing freely in and out. No need to push the breath--just relax around it and give it room to flow all through the body.
- Breathe through the nostrils, not the mouth, whenever possible. (This calms the mind and prevents strain on the body.)
- Let your breath remind you when you are doing too much. When you are gasping and out of breath, slow down a bit so that you can work within your breath, As you gain stamina and lung capacity you will be able to exercise more and more vigorously while breathing easily and without strain.
- Enjoy on each exhale a letting-go- breath. Release tension, strain and discomfort as you breathe out: ahhhhh...

8. Work within your range of motion.

Gradually this will extend and you will do more with ease. If you force muscles beyond their range of motion they will contract in fear and self protection.

9. Practice Relaxation-in-Action.

Notice muscles that are unnecessarily tight and let them relax. How *easy* can you let each action be? Cats are fabulous movement teachers. Watch a cat move and imagine your own body: sleek relaxed, supple and powerful, moving with no extra tension exerted.

10. Avoid repetitive movements: especially when there is weight or pressure on the joints.

11. Have fun!

Find a type of exercise that feels like fun to you. Use the buddy system and regularly walk with friends, meet friends at the pool, sign up for a class with a friend or make new friends in a class. How can *you* help exercising be more fun for *you*?

12. Choose an exercise class or DVD that has a gentle, therapeutic focus.

13. Go at your own speed.

Sometimes in a group, or even watching an exercise DVD, we over-ride our own body wisdom to keep up or compete. When you are recovering from illness or dealing with chronic pain, it is vital that you listen to your body and work gently.

14. Take breathing/stretching breaks all through your day to prevent the build-up of tension.

Examples:

- Inhale: lift your shoulders to your ears.
- Exhale: Release the shoulders slowly down, tension draining away...
- Inhale: allow the arms to float out to the side
- Exhale: arms float gently out and down

16. Use your powerful imagination wisely.

Imagination can work for you or against you. Use yours to work for you by imagining what you want (strength, muscle tone, balance, energy and beauty) and by imagining yourself gradually gaining the ability to exercise more fully and more easily.

17. Warm your muscles.

Warm muscles exercise more happily than cold muscles. Exercise in a comfortably warm room. Wear layers so you can adjust your body temperature. Use a heating pad on sore muscles before or while stretching them. Stretch gently in a warm bath or shower.

- **Remember-- your body is made to move! So, *get moving-* gently and kindly.**
- **Start where you are right now; believe/know imagine/trust that you *will* improve.**
- **Don't give up! There *are* forms of exercise that can be helpful and enjoyable for you!**
- **You *can* feel better with intelligent exercise.**

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