

MAINTAINING
FLEXIBILITY
IN OLDER AGE



PREFACE

Please note: The advice given within this booklet is for general guidance only, and does not replace any specific instructions given by your health professional (doctor, pharmacist, nurse or physiotherapist).

If you are unsure whether the text is appropriate to your specific case, medical advice should be sought.

MAINTAINING MOBILITY IN OLD AGE

Everyone should try to keep as fit and mobile as possible. It makes you feel better and enables you to maintain a wide range of activities that stiffness and immobility deny.

As we get older, it is even more important that mobility is maintained. Lack of exercise and movement can quickly lead to stiff joints and weak muscles. As the saying goes, 'use it or lose it'. The more mobile you are, the better able you will be to go out, visit family and friends and, perhaps most importantly, retain your independence.

Age should never be an excuse for giving up hobbies or activities. Many people look forward to retirement as a time to 'put their feet up' after a lifetime of hard work. Relaxation is very important but a permanent lack of exercise could lead to degeneration. So flexibility is the watchword to a happy and healthy old age.



PERFORMING EVERYDAY CHORES MORE EASILY



Regardless of age, many of us manage physical tasks in a particular way, often because we've always done them that way. Yet these may not be the easiest and most effective ways of undertaking these tasks.

Standing for hours over a kitchen work surface may be totally unnecessary; could you do the same job sitting comfortably at a table, thus safeguarding your neck and back?

When you're at work, shopping once a week seems sensible. Once retired, buying little and often may be better as, not only will you get the exercise of walking to, from and round the shop, you will have less to carry home at any one time.

Try to organise your living space to ensure that things you need every day are stored within easy reach. Bending down or stretching up to get things out of cupboards can lead to back and shoulder strain.

Whether doing gardening, cleaning, decorating, ironing or any physical activity, you should always try to avoid doing too much all at once. 'Little and often' is a better approach. Try to vary how you perform each task in order to use different sets of muscles.

SOME EXERCISES FOR OLDER PEOPLE

In the morning

Before getting out of bed take a few deep breaths, have a good stretch (gently does it!), and sit up slowly to avoid dizziness. Then sit on the edge of the bed and take a few more deep breaths. Bend and straighten your knees, and make sure you are not dizzy before you stand up.



A simple exercise routine

A few minutes spent each day on the gentle exercises described on the following pages may help you to increase your flexibility and help you to keep up with your everyday activities. Each of these exercises should be repeated 3 to 6 times. If you are likely to be unsteady please do all the exercises sitting on a strong, solid, upright dining type chair.

1

BODY STRETCHING

Stand or sit tall.

Raise both arms above the head and reach for the ceiling with your fingertips.
Bring arms down and relax.



2

BODY BENDING

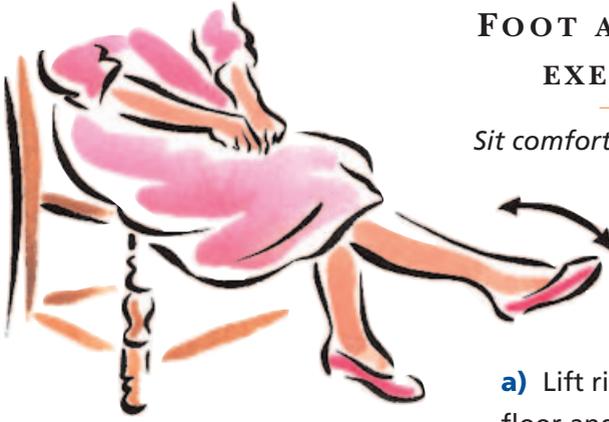
Stand or sit tall with feet apart and arms at your side.

Slowly bend sideways to the right, then to the left, allowing your hands to slide down your leg, or towards the floor if sitting.
Stand or sit tall between bends.



FOOT AND ANKLE EXERCISES

Sit comfortably on a chair.



- a)** Lift right foot off floor and bend your ankle lifting your toes upwards, then stretch downwards pointing toes, relax.
Repeat with left foot.



- b)** Lift right foot off floor and slowly circle foot at the ankle, relax.
Repeat with the left foot.

4

KNEE BENDING AND STRAIGHTENING

Sit with knees slightly bent.

a) Keeping right knee bent, lift the knee upwards, lower and relax.

Repeat with left knee.

b) Lift right leg off ground and straighten leg completely, then bend knee bringing leg back to the floor and relax.

Repeat with left leg.



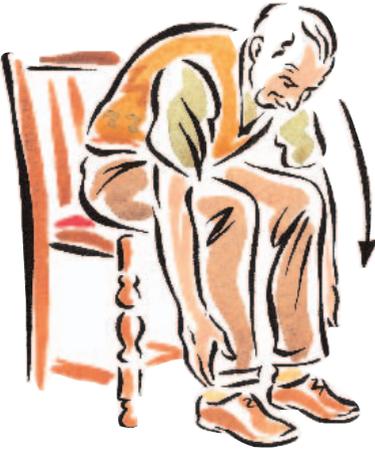
5

ELBOW CIRCLING

Stand or sit with your finger tips touching your shoulders.

Circle right elbow backwards slowly, making as big a circle as possible then relax. Repeat with the left.





FORWARD BENDING.

*Sit comfortably on a chair,
with knees bent.*

a) Slowly bend forward at the waist and reach down towards your ankles being careful not to overstretch. Slowly straighten up and relax.



b) Try to move your right elbow towards your left knee, twisting at the waist. Straighten up. Repeat with the left elbow towards the right knee.

If any of these exercises cause more than a slight degree of discomfort, stop and try again the next day. If there is still discomfort stop and report this to your doctor at your next visit.

WHEN TO REFER TO A GP OR PHYSIOTHERAPIST

If you haven't taken any exercise for some time and you want to engage in something vigorous, it is sensible first to have a check-up by your GP.



We all get aches and pains, whatever our age.

There is evidence that older people are more tolerant of pain than younger people. However, you shouldn't let joints stiffen badly before going to see your doctor. Many people develop arthritis in old age. Physiotherapists are able to advise on appropriate exercises to maintain mobility and flexibility.

For a referral to an NHS physiotherapist, you will need to see your GP first in most cases.

If you want to see a private chartered physiotherapist, names and addresses are available in your local Yellow Pages or Thomson Directory, or from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (see back cover).

THE ROLE OF PAIN-KILLERS

Pain-killers can be very useful in helping you to rest and relax by easing the pain. When muscles are damaged this can lead to inflammation which is why the doctor may, in certain circumstances, recommend that you take or rub on an anti-inflammatory pain-killer. This can be a medicine to be swallowed or alternatively a gel, cream or spray which can be applied directly to the skin around the painful area. Whichever treatment is given, the relief from rheumatic pain and inflammation will help you to resume your everyday activities. It is important that you always read the label of your medicine and follow the instructions carefully.



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