



# Exercising with muscular dystrophy

## Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

## How to get started

An exercise plan can help you improve your heart and lung health and muscle strength, enable better mobility and reduce your risk of falls. Regular exercise significantly reduces your risk of heart disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, stroke and osteoporosis. It also helps with your ability to enjoy the activities of daily living, including work and leisure time with family and friends.

Your doctor and healthcare team can help you develop an exercise plan that maximizes the health benefits and effectiveness of regular exercise. Adhering to an exercise plan will help you prolong movement periods by increasing muscle strength, particularly those used for posture, maintaining lung capacity and slow the rate of increased weakness or contracture, making stair climbing and other daily activities easier.

**Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.**

## Warm up and cool down

**Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely.** Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

**Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely.** Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

## Be active

### Some is good, more is better

<b>How much:</b>	Aim for at least <b>150 – 300</b> minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least <b>75–150</b> minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve.
<b>How hard:</b>	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.
<b>How long:</b>	Aim to spread out your session throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10-minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer.

<b>What type:</b>	All physical activity counts. Try low-impact activities within your abilities: walking, cycling, swimming, water aerobics, hiking—choose something you enjoy! Recreational team sports such as basketball, golf, and tennis are great social activities too! Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health.
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### What will it do for me?

*Cardiovascular exercise will help you reduce fatigue, improve your stamina and maintain your overall health.*

## Build strength

<b>How much:</b>	At least twice a week.
<b>How hard:</b>	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time.
<b>How long:</b>	Choose a variety of 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Try 1–2 sets.
<b>What type:</b>	A variety of strength exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a can of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight. Strength exercises you can do at home include squats, calf raises, wall push-ups, arm curls, knee curls, front and side arm raise, and chair stand.

### What will it do for me?

*Stronger muscles can prolong your independence in basic activities of daily living, such as moving about your home, dressing and bathing yourself and climbing stairs. They also improve the muscles and posture used in breathing. Range-of-motion exercises for the limbs can also maintain muscle and joint flexibility and help improve posture, which may reduce your risks of curvature of the spine.*

## Improve balance

<b>How much:</b>	At least three days a week. Start with one session per week, if necessary, and gradually work towards two.
<b>How hard:</b>	Choose 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10–15 times.
<b>How long:</b>	Hold each balance for 10–30 seconds.
<b>What type:</b>	Try yoga, Tai Chi or home balance exercises such as standing on one foot, a heel-to-toe walk or a balance walk lifting one leg at a time. Always exercise safely. If you are at high risk of falling, do seated balance exercises or use a sturdy chair or wall for support.

### What will it do for me?

Practicing balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to a loss of balance and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries.



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## Sedentary living

**Reduce the amount of time being sedentary.** Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

**Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity).** It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

## Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer. Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none!**

## Exercise safety

Avoid exercising in cold water and in extreme environments or temperatures as these can affect muscle tone. Walking should be done only on level surfaces such as a track or indoor flooring to reduce the risk of falling.

Do not exercise to exhaustion. Pace yourself and consider what other activities you are doing during the day/week. Adjust your exercises to suit your health needs and abilities.

Ask your doctor for more information about how to exercise safely and effectively and how to maintain an exercise plan. Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level. Always exercise within your abilities.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you.

## Resources

Muscular Dystrophy Canada provides information and support for individuals living with muscular dystrophy. <https://muscle.ca/services-support/>

Scan for more physical activity resources!

