

EXERCISE GUIDELINES FOR POLIO SURVIVORS

Exercise is defined as planned, structured, and repetitive body movement. Physical activity is movement occurring during daily activities. A therapeutic exercise program is designed for health benefit- generally to reduce pain, increase strength, increase endurance and increase the ability to do daily activities. Not all polio weakness is due to overuse, often lack of exercise and physical activity leads to muscle wasting and cardiovascular deconditioning. Research supports a carefully designed therapeutic exercise program for most polio survivors to enhance optimal health and function. The program should be individualized and modified if problems arise.

Important principles to follow are:

1. Start very slowly. Often 3-5 minutes is all that can be tolerated initially if muscles have not been exercised for a period of time.
2. Interval exercise, short bouts of exercise alternating with rest periods, can be very effective.
3. Progression should be slow, especially in polio- affected muscles.
4. Intensity should be low to moderate.
5. The plan should include a rotation of different types of exercise such as stretching, cardiovascular (aerobic) conditioning, strengthening, and range of motion exercises.
6. Pacing should be incorporated into the program with at least one day of rest between strengthening exercise sessions.
7. Aquatic exercise is often ideal as the buoyancy of the water help to support weak muscles and unweight joints while providing mild resistance to muscles. Remember it is easy to overdo in the pool because it is so much easier to move! !
8. Be aware that signs of overuse can occur 24-48 hours after too strenuous exercise or an overly active day. Symptoms of overuse indicate a need to decrease the amount of exercise or decrease the frequency of activity. The symptoms to watch for are: muscle cramps and spasms, muscle twitching, muscle pain and extreme fatigue.

REMEMBER THAT YOU CAN EXERCISE SAFELY AND IMPROVE YOUR CONDITION IF YOU APPROACH IT WITH PATIENCE AND CONSISTENCY! !

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