

Physical Activity And Exercise

- **Each polio survivor will have different physical capacity**
- **Keeping as mobile as you can has a range of health benefits**
- **Activity should focus on preventing weakness but not working the muscles to exhaustion**
- **Work with a health professional to see what physical activity is appropriate for you**

Physical activity involves moving your body in any way. This helps to maintain your strength and mobility. For example, going grocery shopping and hanging out washing.

Exercise is a form of physical activity that is planned and structured to try and increase strength, aerobic fitness or flexibility. For example, hydrotherapy or going to the gym.

For some polio survivors, physical activity tasks around the house will be enough. For others, they will need to do exercise. Talk to your general practitioner, [physiotherapist](#) or [exercise physiologist](#) to find out what is best for you.

How do you know whether to exercise (or not)?

Many polio survivors are concerned of losing motor neurones. This results in a loss of strength. This can occur from doing too much activity or exercise, but depends on many factors including:

- the amount of motor neurones/strength lost from the poliovirus
- the amount of strength regained after infection
- the current level of strength in the muscle
- how much the muscle strength changes over time

However, there are significant benefits of being physically active; it can:

- increase muscle strength
- improve bone health

- increase mobility
- improve respiratory function
- reduce cardiovascular disease risks
- make daily tasks easier

There is no test or guideline for polio survivors on exercise type, duration, intensity or frequency. All polio survivors are different. It is important to do what you can.

Testing

There are two tests to assess whether a muscle has reduced motor neurone supply and the level of fatigue within a muscle:

- Electromyographic (EMG) study (general practitioner referral required)
- manual muscle strength test (by a [physiotherapist](#) or [exercise physiologist](#))

How Much Should I Do? - Physical Activity Guidelines

[Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines](#) are guidelines for the general population. The guidelines state:

- any form of moderate exercise is better than nothing
- you should accumulate 30 minutes of moderate activity each day (moderate intensity is defined as between 2 to 5 out of 10 on a 10-point scale - 0=very light; 10=maximal intensity)

The intensity, duration and frequency may need to be adjusted for polio survivors. It is important to avoid fatigue and undue stress to muscles. Activities should work with your current lifestyle.

If you find a new activity replaces other things you were doing, it is not right for you. For example if a bike ride means you're unable to do some house work. You may need to change the type, amount or intensity of activity.

Consider how much stress you are putting on your muscles. Be careful not to over exert. This can happen with any activity including gym, gardening, hydrotherapy, or a combination of these.

Fatigue and muscle soreness

Activity should focus on preventing weakness (from disuse) but not working the muscles to exhaustion (over use). This helps to avoid a loss of strength and function. You should consider the following before starting an exercise program:

- any recent changes in strength or muscle size
- general and specific muscle fatigue
- any muscle soreness they experience after muscle testing

Monitor the amount of fatigue and muscle soreness you experience. When making changes to reduce these symptoms, make one change at a time. Some muscle soreness and fatigue may be experienced with starting an activity. Monitor this and discuss with your health and medical professionals.

Fatigue can be a result of many factors and can be difficult to determine. To avoid fatigue or muscle soreness from physical activity:

- start at a light intensity
- introduce one new activity within the week
- have rest/light days throughout the week
- start with a reduced volume/duration for exercise (e.g. 1 set of exercises with a smaller number of repetitions)
- increase the rest periods between and after the exercises
- minimise muscle contraction during the lengthening phase (e.g. use resistance bands/tubing, water exercise, machines over dumbbells)

Exercise and activity levels change throughout life. Sometimes it is appropriate to maintain with the activity you are currently doing. Other times, you may be able to add more or reduce activity within your lifestyle.

More Information

- Discuss exercise options with your general practitioner
- Visit Polio Australia's **Health Professional Register** to find a **Physiotherapist** or **Exercise Physiologist** to assist you

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