

Winter Exercise

So, the days are drawing in, it's chilly and you are getting busier and busier in the run up to Christmas. Add pain, stiffness and fatigue to that and it's very tempting to hang up your exercise gear and hibernate.



Don't! You will feel better physically and mentally if you can keep active over the winter months. Here are our 5 top tips for keeping active in the winter.

1 Listen to your body and find that vital balance between doing too much and too little each day

Regular exercise can make you feel more energetic, which should make it a little easier to get moving on cold, dark mornings. There's some limited research suggesting that moderate exercise can strengthen the immune system. If the shorter days are affecting your mood, being active can improve your sense of wellbeing.

BUT along with pain and stiffness AS causes fatigue so take it easy and don't be too hard on yourself. Remember you will have good days and bad days. Aim to do a little more than you think you can on a bad day and a little less than you think you can on a good day.

If you're trying something new, don't overdo it. Slowly build the amount of exercise you do.

2 Warm up

Always warm up before any exercise session – especially if you are going to do some stretching. A warm up does exactly what it says on the tin. It warms up your body by increasing blood flow to the working muscles. This prepares your body for exercise and means your muscles are ready to exercise so you are less likely to injure yourself.

To warm up at home you could march on the spot or use your bottom stair to do step ups.

Aim to spend 5 to 10 minutes warming up.

3 Pay attention to your posture

When you are rushing in the cold from home to the shops, work or the school pick up it's easy to hunch up your shoulders and huddle down into your coat.

Think posture. Relax your shoulders and straighten up. Use our YouTube video to check your posture.

It helps to keep nice and warm, so if it's chilly wear several layers to keep the heat in. A lot of heat escapes through your head, so consider wearing a hat too.





4 Find something you enjoy doing outdoors

Walking is an excellent, low impact way of toning your muscles. You can set your own pace with walking according to how you feel day to day and can build up over time. Here are some great websites that can help you find some winter walks.

It's really worth looking into Nordic walking. This is where you use specially designed poles with a technique that is similar to the upper body action of classic cross country skiing. The result is a full body workout, without putting any stress on the joints.

We generally advise walking rather than running because the impact of running can make your pain worse. However, some people with AS can run comfortably so do talk to your physiotherapist about what's right for you. If you want to try running

then Couch to 5k is a great way to get started.

Cycling is another great low impact outdoor activity which can really improve fitness and stamina. It's worth trying if you aren't having too much pain and have flexibility in your spine and neck. Check with your physiotherapist first if you have a lot of stiffness and fusion.

If you are exercising after dark do ensure you stay safe by keeping to well-lit areas and wearing bright and reflective clothing. Think about exercising with a friend. Do avoid listening to music when exercising outdoors. Not hearing what is going on around you can make you vulnerable.

If rain, ice or snow is making exercise dangerous, do it another day. The weather might be better tomorrow, but an injury could take weeks to heal.

5 Find something you enjoy doing indoors

NASS has some great guides to exercising safely at home or in the gym and don't forget our fantastic NASS groups which offer regular supervised physiotherapy sessions.

Now might be the time to try something new that you can do indoors such as:

- aqua aerobics
- archery
- bowls
- dancing
- pilates
- swimming
- table tennis
- tai chi
- walking football
- yoga