Stay Safe and Active With Seated Exercise

by ABIGAIL BUDD

The Benefits of Seated Exercise

We all know exercise is beneficial, right? We are bombarded by images and stories in the media about the positive effects of exercise, yet it can be so difficult to motivate ourselves to start, especially with a condition like multiple sclerosis (MS).

For me, having MS is the perfect excuse not to exercise. I'm tired enough juggling work and my family, how am I supposed to fit exercise in as well? I worry about the effect it will have on me — will I be too exhausted to go to work the next day?

There's also the small problem of limited mobility — how am I supposed to exercise when I can't walk without sticks and find it difficult to stand for longer than a few moments?

Why Should We Exercise?

Exercise is on my "to do" list but what are the benefits for someone like me? It used to be thought that people with MS shouldn't exercise as it would make symptoms worse, but now we are encouraged to get off our behinds and do what we can!

Benefits include:

- Improving the overall health of those of us with milder MS.
- Helping improve mobility for people with more severe MS.
- Helping manage symptoms and decrease the risk of heart disease.
- Helping improve muscle strength and general fitness, mobility or weakness problems.
- Helping manage weight, especially when combined with a healthy, well-balanced diet.
- Helping improve fatigue, especially long-term.

Give Seated Exercise a Try

One solution to combat the barriers you may be facing is seated exercise. This is where exercises and weights are done without having to get off your behind!

There is an exercise class at my local MS treatment center I've been avoiding since I learned about it. My friend, Shoshana, raves about it and loves the way you can take it at your own pace. You can sit the whole time or transfer to the floor if you feel able to get up again.

They even do weight training while sitting down and concentrate on building up the strength in your arms. This is particularly important if you have MS, as you may need strength in the upper body to make sure you can transfer in and out of your chair or scooter if you use them.

Shoshana's been doing "sadistic physical education" for five years and she says it's improved her strength and stamina. She's also lost around 60 pounds, which is not only an amazing achievement, but also makes getting around so much easier.

Managing fatigue while exercise is all about planning. You may feel like you can't do anything else for the rest of the evening after the class, so ensure you keep your evening free.

One benefit of a seated exercise class is that you don't have to get changed again afterwards. Compared to swimming, where the heat in the changing rooms means limiting the amount of lengths you do so you're still able to get dressed again, a seated class means you can stay in your sweats and get changed later.

Shoshana has noticed a long-term improvement in her fatigue even though she's often exhausted directly after the class. The next day she feels amazing, even when her arms are aching — the aches and pains remind her she's doing something positive to improve herself.

The one thing exercise won't do, unfortunately, is repair the damage MS has done to our bodies. It can, however, give us the best chance of maintaining what we can do, not to mention the psychological benefits of taking back some control.

Get Started Today!

Go online and see if there are classes near you. The social aspect of doing exercise with other people can be beneficial in its own right.

You don't have to go to a class to start seated exercise. You can look up seated exercises and videos online to target balance, endurance, flexibility and strength. You can also use weights you have around the house — I use cans of soup to lift above my head while sitting to improve my core strength. This can be done while watching TV, so there really aren't any excuses not to start.

The best thing about exercising is to retain as much power and control over your own health as possible. Rather than sitting around waiting for this disease to take its toll on you, why not attack it head-on and show it who's boss!