

- The muscles at the back of your thighs (hamstrings) can also be associated with a tight lower back. To stretch your hamstrings and lower back sit on the floor with your back straight - you can support it against a wall. With your knees bent up, place a rolled up towel under your feet, holding either end in your hands. Slowly straighten out your legs, keeping your back straight. Feel the pull at the back of your thighs. Take deep sighing breaths and try and relax into the stretch. Hold for 10 – 20 seconds and relax. To increase the stretch, straighten your legs fully and then gently take your body forwards, bending from your hips, rather than rounding your back or shoulders (see picture 6)
- On your hands and knees, with your knees below your hips and hands below your shoulders and back flat, take a deep breath in. Breathe out slowly at the same time as pulling your abdominal

muscles up and in, so your back gently arches up (known as the cat stretch). Breathe in and release back to a flat back. Repeat X 5-10. (see picture 7)



Picture 6. Hamstring stretch



Picture 7. Cat stretch

Exercise for people with ankylosing spondylitis

Take Action

Ankylosing spondylitis (AS) mainly affects the spine and may lead to severe stiffness in the back. Spondylitis is an inflammation of the joints of the spine, as the inflammation goes and healing takes place, bone grows out from both sides of the vertebrae and may join the two bones together. This is known as ankylosing and causes the joints to stiffen. AS usually starts in the lower back and works up the spine. AS in the upper back (thoracic area) can affect breathing. AS can involve other joints.

Keep active

In AS, exercise is vital to stop joints stiffening up.

- Swimming and exercises in a heated pool are good for people with AS
- If you have neck restriction, use a snorkel or mask when swimming
- Exercising with a large exercise ball (at least 65 centimetres in diameter) is useful for strengthening core muscles, whilst accommodating the decreased range in movement in the spine, hips and shoulders
- Deep breathing exercises help improve and maintain lung capacity
- Try and maintain good posture at all times
- Lie on your front on a firm surface morning and evening
- Pain medication can help with sleep and give sufficient relief to exercise
- Avoid exercises that require bending any of the fused or hypermobile joints, and sports or activities involving contact or the risk of falling.



This information has been produced by PARE Manifesto as part of World Arthritis Day 2006, which promotes better quality of life for people with arthritis.

For more information about the PARE Manifesto, visit www.paremanifesto.org

For further information about World Arthritis Day, visit www.worldarthritisday.org

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Disclaimer Whilst every care has been taken in preparing these materials the authors and producers of this booklet/fact sheet do not accept responsibility for any injury caused as a result of undertaking any of these exercises or activities. It is recommended that medical advice is taken if there is any doubt about the suitability of these exercises for an individual.

As we are all different, exercises that would help one person might not be suitable for another. Always check with your doctor, specialist or physiotherapist before commencing an exercise programme.

Controlled stretch (standing)

- Stand with your heels and buttocks against a wall. Try to flatten your shoulder blades to the wall and gently press the back of your head to touch the wall, keeping your chin down. Hold for a count of five and then relax. Repeat X 10
- Add to this exercise by raising your right arm forwards and upwards with the elbow straight, your upper arm close to your ear and your thumb towards the wall. Hold for a count of five and lower. Repeat with the left arm. Repeat X 5 with each arm.

Sitting exercises

The following exercises can all be performed sitting on a firm chair or stool. This will help you keep the lower part of your body stable.

- Sit tall with your feet and knees hip-width apart, shoulders above your hips, hips facing forwards.

Maintain this position as you perform each of the following movements.

(see picture 1)



Picture 1.

Deep breathing

- Rest your hands on the lower part of your rib cage, just above your waist.
- Breath in slowly through your nose, filling your lungs with air. Feel your rib

cage expand up and outwards. You may also feel your abdomen (stomach muscles) expand as you breath in

- Breath out slowly through your mouth. Feel your ribs move down and inwards. You can draw in your abdominals as you breathe out
- Repeat X 5–10
- Don't hold your breath. Stop if you start to feel dizzy.

You can also practice this exercise lying flat on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor or bed.

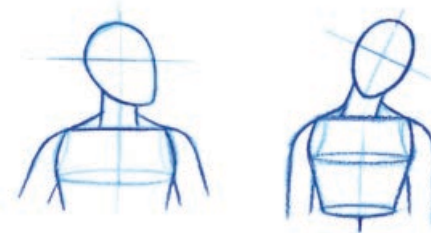
Shoulders

- Circle your shoulders smoothly backwards incorporating each of these points – forwards, up, back and down. Repeat X 5 – 10.

Neck exercises

Watch points

- All neck exercises should be performed slowly and smoothly. Do not jerk your head or force a position
- Avoid circular movements of the neck.
- Drop your chin and turn your head slowly and smoothly to look over your right shoulder as far as it will comfortably go and hold for 5–10 seconds. Then turn your head slowly to look over your left shoulder and hold for 5–10 seconds. Repeat X 2 – 3 each side (see picture 2)



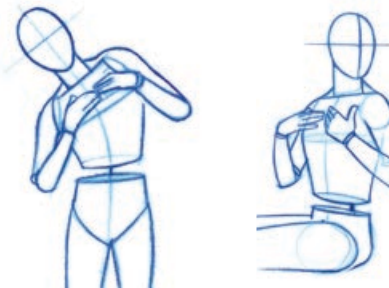
Picture 2. Neck mobilise - head turns

Picture 3. Neck stretch - head tilts

- Without lifting your chin, tilt your head to the side so your right ear goes down towards your right shoulder. Hold this position for up to 5-10 seconds and bring your head back to the centre. Tilt your head over to the left and hold for 5-10 seconds. Take a deep sighing breath and try and relax into the stretch. You can repeat this movement two, or three times a day. (see picture 3)

Side bends

- Sitting on a firm chair with your spine lengthened, tilt your upper body over to the right so you feel a stretch up your left side. Hold for 5-10 seconds and come slowly upright. Repeat to the other side. Repeat X 2–5 each side. (see picture 4)



Picture 4. Side bends

Picture 5. Waist turns

Waist turns

- Keeping your hips facing forwards, breath out and gently rotate your upper body to the right as far as it will comfortably go. Hold for 5–10 seconds, breath in and release back to your starting position. Repeat to the left. Repeat again X 2–5 on both sides. (see picture 5)

Floor exercises

If you find it hard to lie on the floor these exercises can be done on a firm bed.

Back exercises

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Lift your hips slowly off the floor as far as you can without arching your back. Feel your buttocks tighten. Hold and then lower down. Repeat X 5–10
- Lie on your front with your arms stretched out in front of you. Keeping both hips on the floor and your neck straight so you are facing the floor, lift your right leg and left arm stretching them away from each other. Hold for a few seconds and then lower slowly. Then repeat, but lifting your right arm and left leg. Repeat X 5–10 each side