The Hemodialysis Exercise Program

Information for patients and families

Read this information to learn:

• how the exercise program can help
• how to join the program
• what to expect
• tips to help you succeed
What is the hemodialysis exercise program?

The hemodialysis exercise program is a program designed to help you keep up or improve your body’s health. We encourage all of our hemodialysis patients to be active.

Almost everyone can exercise. What’s best for you depends on your medical condition and how well you can get around.

How can the program help me?

Exercise can:

✓ improve your mood
✓ give you more energy
✓ make your muscles stronger and more flexible
✓ improve your sleep
✓ make it easier for you to do your daily activities
✓ improve the blood flow to your muscles
✓ improve how quickly waste is cleared from your blood while on hemodialysis
✓ help keep your muscles moving and strong
✓ give you more control over your life

How do I join the program?

Talk to your nephrologist or your nurse in the Hemodialysis Unit. We need a referral from your nephrologist for a physiotherapist to assess you.
What happens during an assessment?

You will meet with a physiotherapist. A physiotherapist is a health care professional who can help you improve your body’s movement and decrease your pain. They do this by assessing you and putting together an exercise plan that is best for you.

The physiotherapist could suggest exercises to do while you are on dialysis or a program you do at home. They could also refer you to an outside exercise program. The program usually includes any or all 3 kinds of these exercises:

- **Flexibility exercises**
  These exercises gently stretch your muscles to improve your flexibility and balance.

- **Strengthening exercises**
  These exercises include things like lifting weights, using elastic bands or your own body weight to make your muscles work harder and get stronger.

- **Cardiovascular exercise**
  These exercises include things like using a stationary bike or continually moving your arms and legs to make your heart, lungs and circulatory system work better.

What happens during an exercise session?

We will encourage you exercise during your dialysis. A physiotherapist or a physiotherapist assistant will be available to you. They will check your blood pressure and heart rate before and after your exercise sessions. They will also see how you respond to exercise and keep track of how you are doing.

If it’s the right thing for you, we will encourage you to do your exercises on your own during dialysis. You can record how well you are doing, and a physiotherapist will check on you from time to time. A physiotherapist may not be available on all dialysis shifts. You can talk to your medical team for more details.
How do I stay safe during exercise?

**Stop exercising and tell your medical team right away if you:**

- are very short of breath
- have chest pain or feel pressure in your chest
- have an irregular (not normal) heart beat
- have nausea or an upset stomach
- feel dizzy or lightheaded
- have leg cramps
- feel very tired (more than normal)
- have blurry vision

**Don’t exercise for as long or as hard if:**

- you would describe how you are exercising as **very hard** or **very, very hard**
- you are breathing too hard to talk
- your muscles get so sore that you can’t exercise the next day
- you don’t feel recovered 1 hour after you exercise

**What will help me succeed?**

**Commit to it:**

- Give exercise a try for at least 3 months. Only 1 session won’t help. You will get results if you exercise regularly over a longer time.
- Decide that you can do it! Other people may encourage you or check how you are doing, but only you can do it!
Make a plan:

• Think about your exercise goals.
• Write down exactly what you want to achieve.
  For example, you may want to:
  ▪ be able to walk longer distances
  ▪ be able to climb stairs with less pain
  ▪ feel less tired throughout the day

Know what to expect:

It will be easier to stick to your exercise plan if you know what to expect:

• It will take time to build your strength and see results.
• Your muscles may feel tired and sore if they aren’t used to regular exercise, but they shouldn’t hurt.
• You can expect good and bad days. Try to do a little even on a bad day.
• It may actually make you feel better.
• Over time, your endurance may improve. Better endurance will help you be active longer without getting tired.
• You can expect to miss exercise sessions for many reasons, including being in the hospital. Don’t quit! Go over your plan with your physiotherapist, and get back to it.

For more information, please talk to your doctor about a physiotherapy referral.