

# The Hemodialysis Exercise Program



## Information for Patients

UHN



The Hemodialysis Exercise Program is designed to help you maintain or improve your physical health and well-being.

We encourage all Hemodialysis patients to take part in this program. Almost everyone can exercise. What's best for you depends on your medical condition and how well you can get around.

### What Are the Benefits of Exercise?

- Feel better and be able to do more.
- Have more energy.
- Make muscles stronger and more flexible with regular exercise.
- Improve your sleep.
- Have a greater sense of control over your life.
- Improve your tolerance for your day to day activities.
- See less drop in your blood pressure during dialysis treatment.

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- Improve blood flow to your muscles.
- Maintain the muscle strength and mobility you have now.

### **How Do You Join the Program?**

Talk to your nephrologist or your nurse in the Hemodialysis Unit.  
We need a referral from the Nephrologist for a physiotherapist to assess you.

### **What Happens During an Assessment?**

A physiotherapist will assess you to see which type of exercise is best for you, and then put together an exercise plan for you.

The physiotherapist could suggest exercise while you are on dialysis, a personal home exercise program, or a referral to an outside exercise program. A fitness program includes any or all 3 types of these exercises:

1. **Flexibility Exercise:** Gentle muscle stretching to improve flexibility and balance.
2. **Strengthening Exercise:** Resistance training (such as weights, elastic bands or your own body weight) to make your muscles work harder.
3. **Cardiovascular Exercise:** Sustained, rhythmic movements of your arms and/or legs (such as a treadmill or a stationary bike, etc.) to make your heart, lungs and circulation work better.

### **What Happens During an Exercise Session?**

We encourage you to exercise while you are receiving your dialysis treatments. A physiotherapist or a physiotherapist assistant will supervise you and 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 is the right thing for you, we will encourage you to do your exercises on your own and record how well you are doing, to be checked on by physiotherapy staff from time to time.

\*Certain Dialysis shifts do not have continuous coverage by a physiotherapist. Check with your medical team for details.

### **How to Keep Safe During Your Exercise**

If you notice any of the following symptoms, stop exercising and tell your medical team right away.

- Excessive shortness of breath
- Chest pain or pressure
- Irregular heart beats
- Nausea (upset stomach)



- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Leg cramps
- Excessive fatigue (feeling very tired)
- Blurring vision

Reduce your exercise time and/or intensity if:

- You feel like you are working “very hard” or “very, very hard”
- You are breathing too hard to talk
- Your muscles get too sore that you cannot exercise the next day
- You do not feel recovered one hour after you exercise

## **What You Need To Succeed**

### **Make a Commitment**

- Give exercise a try for at least 3 months. One session will not help. Regular exercise over a period of time will get results.
- You can do it! Other people may encourage you or check how you are doing, but you and only you can do it!

### **Make a Plan**

- Think about your goals
- Write down exactly what you want to achieve

### **Be Realistic**

- You will be more likely to stick to your exercise plan if you know what to expect:
- Results take time. It will take time to build strength.
- Your muscles may feel tired and sore if they are not used to regular exercise, but they should not 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 to 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 you can get back to it.

**For more information, please contact your doctor for a physiotherapy referral.**

