

HEALTHY LIVING TIPS

EXERCISE

Try to Be Physically Active

Many people with chronic illnesses become less active over time. Sometimes this is caused by pain or stiffness, sometimes by fatigue, sometimes by depression. This also can happen to people with Scleroderma. Joints can become stiff or painful. The skin can be sensitive. The hands can be swollen or ulcers can cause pain.

Unfortunately, the less active you are, the more your body becomes weak, stiff and out of shape. This can make pain and fatigue even worse.

What can you do?

If you haven't already done so, talk to your physician about what types of activities you should avoid. Also ask him or her about exercise – even walking regularly. Ask whether she can recommend a regular flexibility and strengthening program for you. Even if your doctor recommends against exercise, think about how you can spend more time out of bed and doing activities you enjoy such as playing with grandchildren, working on arts and crafts or visiting friends. People often say they can't be active or exercise because they feel fatigued. This creates a vicious cycle. You can become fatigued because of a lack of activity and then not be active because of the fatigue. Trying hard to motivate yourself to exercise the next time you are tired may be the answer. You don't have to run a marathon, do an hour of aerobics or join a gym. Just going outside and walking around the block can help. Even stretching exercises or a good laugh with a friend can help you feel less tired.

Aim for an Active Lifestyle

One way to become more physically active is to set aside special time for exercising such as walking with a friend, taking a yoga class, or working in your garden. But don't forget about the value of just being more physically active throughout the day. Just doing your regular activities in a more active way can make an important difference. Being more physical in everyday life can pay off.

- Make a goal of getting out of the house every day. Spending too much time in bed will only make you feel more tired.
- Take a stroll after dinner instead of watching TV.
- If you can take the stairs up a flight instead of waiting for the elevator.
- Work in the garden or play with your grandchildren.
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These types of activities can add up to health benefits. Even small amounts of daily activity can increase your fitness and improve your mood.

Develop an Exercise Program, with Your Doctor's OK

Before starting any exercise program, check with your doctor. She can tell you what level of activity is right for your Scleroderma.

Exercise Regularly

For many people, setting aside time to exercise is helpful. This should be done several times a week.

Develop a Good Program

Plan your exercise program so that it includes 3 things:

1. **Flexibility.** Do gentle stretching exercises to increase your flexibility. Flexibility relates to how well the joints move comfortably through a normal range of motion. If you are not flexible, it can cause you pain, increase your risk of injury and make your muscles not work as well.
2. **Strength.** Muscles need to be exercised to keep their strength. Muscles weaken and shrink when they aren't active. The weaker your muscles get the less you feel like using them, the more inactive you tend to become and a vicious cycle develops.
3. **Endurance.** Endurance is your ability to keep up activity for a while. Endurance exercises will help your heart and lungs to stay strong enough to distribute oxygen rich blood to the muscles.

Start Slowly

Warm-up, then more exercise: Plan to begin your fitness program with a flexibility and strengthening **warm-up** to get ready for more **intense exercise** later on. This will help, especially if:

- you haven't exercised regularly in some time,
- you have pain, stiffness, shortness of breath
- you have weakness that interferes with your regular activities

Warm-up only: Plan to limit your fitness program to **warm-up exercises only** if

- You have severe limitations
- Your doctor recommends against exercise
- You are just starting to exercise

What stops you from exercising?

Everyone has 24 hours in a day. But everyone chooses to use that time differently. You may need to change your priorities. It doesn't really take that much time. Even 5 minutes a day is a good start and better than nothing. Also think about combining activities. You can ride an exercise bike while watching TV. You can spend time with your spouse while going for a walk.

- **I don't have enough time.**

Inactivity makes fatigue worse.

- **I'm too tired.**

You don't exercise because you're tired and you're tired because you don't exercise. Regular physical activity can help you feel more energetic. As you exercise you will learn the difference between feeling "out of shape" and feeling physically tired.

- **I'm too old.**

You're never too old for some type of physical activity. No matter what your level of fitness is or you age there are ways to increase activity, energy and your sense of well-being.

- **I'm too sick.**

It may be true that you are too sick for a strenuous or intense exercise program. You can still usually find some ways to be more active. Remember that you can exercise 1 minute at a time, several times a day. Improving your physical fitness can help you better cope with your illness.

- **Exercise is boring**

You can make it more interesting and fun. Exercise with a friend. Listen to music or watch TV while you exercise. Dance to music you like. Change your exercise activities. Take a different walking route.

- **Exercise is painful**

You don't have to follow the old saying "No pain, no gain". There are significant health benefits from gentle, low-intensity activity. You may sweat or feel a bit short of breath. But if you are feeling more pain than before you started you are overdoing it or not exercising the right way.

http://www.hopkinsscleroderma.org/downloads/scleroderma_ed5.pdf