

## Some general pointers on your exercise program

All exercises should be performed in PAIN-FREE range. This does not mean there should be **no discomfort**: when dealing with 'angry bits', it is only to be expected they complain when we start testing them a little.

However, it is **very important** that it not *actively hurt* – remember, pain is the warning label your body slaps on something when it is concerned. We are not so much worried about you damaging yourself (that's probably much harder than you think), but more the response of your *genius four-year-old*, which will likely go into *lockdown mode* in an attempt to protect the area.

We can break the exercises into three main types: mobilisation, stretching and strengthening. There is obviously some overlap between these, and, indeed, it is possible for the 'same' exercise to fulfil different functions when performed in a slightly different way.

**Mobilisation** is simply moving a joint or a muscle through its available range. It is your **short-term management strategy** – if something is stiff or sore, moving it is your best bet. This might seem counter-intuitive – "*it hurts when I move! Why would I want to move it more??*" – but as long as you are careful and controlled – and moving in **pain-free**, if not discomfort-free, range – it will help. Mobilisations create a pumping effect in the tissues, getting fresh blood in, with all of its lovely oxygen and other nutrients, and flushing out e.g. inflammatory mediators that are involved in pain<sup>1</sup>. Mobilisations also help to provide lots of [non-threatening<sup>2</sup>] information-rich feedback from the area.

**Stretching** is your **medium-term management strategy**. 'Stretching' is actually a bit of a misnomer. The one thing we are pretty sure is *not* happening is stretching, or physically lengthening, the tissues. Given that muscles work by contracting, or getting shorter, if we were really 'stretching' them they would be significantly worse at their job (i.e. weaker) after we finished. What seems to be happening is that we are working not on the muscle tissues themselves, but on the neurological 'command-and-control'. We are, in effect, saying to our *genius four year-old* "Don't worry, I can be *trusted*. Please allow me to go a little further here". This is why stretching must also

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<sup>1</sup> Well, actually in tissue repair, but generally if things need repairing, the body decides pain is also an appropriate response!

<sup>2</sup> This is why it's so important for the mobilisations to be in pain-free range.



be done in pain-free range, otherwise the (non-verbal!) answer will "Nuh-uh! You clearly *can't* be trusted, so in fact let's dial the pain levels up a little further".

It also explains why sustained stretching is important (we need time for this 'conversation' to take place), but also why holding a stretch too long can be counter-productive.

**Strengthening** is just what it sounds like (hurrah!). It is your **long-term management strategy**, to really improve things on an ongoing basis. Strengthening the muscles means they don't have to work as hard to do the same job, i.e. they are more *efficient*. They are also better at providing support to the joints, which helps to minimise any 'panic' the body may feel about the area with issues.

## Frequency, duration and intensity

The best time to do your exercises is... ..whenever you can!

Some people do very well doing 'a little, often'. If your daily schedule allows for a few minutes of exercise every day, there is no doubt that this will help. Doing exercises in the morning is great: it helps to minimise any period of stiffness and soreness, and gets us in a great place for the rest of the day. Doing exercises in the evening is also very valuable – it helps to deal with the accumulation of stresses and tensions that eventuate over the course of the day, and may help particularly if you find your pain worse in the evening and night.

However, if your busy life precludes this, don't despair and give the whole routine away. Doing a little more, a couple of times a week, is also a good strategy. Personally, I do a whole bunch, taking several hours, once a week. This is just the way that my life is organised at the moment, with young children etc. It may be less than ideal, especially when life gets in the way and you end up missing an entire week's worth of exercises in one go, but it's what I can do. Don't let perfect be the enemy of good, as my mother used to say.

With regards to intensity, forgive me if I sound like a broken record; but everything **should be in pain-free range**. If you are doing mobilisations or stretches, the goal is feel the area get warm, mobile, and relaxed. If you feel fatigue or pain, it's time to stop! Let me reiterate that *discomfort* is ok, but *pain is not*.

Likewise, when performing your strength exercises, **STOP** if it starts to **hurt**, or the muscles start to feel **fatigued**, or you **start to lose control** of the movement.

If you have any questions, concerns, or issues, please contact your treating osteopath:

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