

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Changes in Mobility - Exercise

Physical activity and good nutrition are perfect partners in good health. Together they help in managing weight and providing energy. Physical activity not only burns calories, but it can also—

- Make the most of muscle strength, or even build strength, depending on the program
- Slowly increase the ability to do more for longer periods of time
- Increase range of motion and joint flexibility (the ability to move easily)
- Strengthen the heart
- Decrease feelings of fatigue
- Decrease symptoms of depression
- Maintain regular bowel and bladder functions
- Cut down on the risk of skin breakdown and irritation
- Protect weight-bearing bone mass (spine, hips, legs)

Good physical fitness is made up of three types of exercise: **stretching**, **strengthening**, and **aerobics**. Each is important by itself, but together they can help the person in your care remain active as long as possible. This will help the person deal better with the changes illness may bring.

A person should always gently stretch before exercise. This warms the muscles, helps prevent stiffness, and improves flexibility and balance. The person should work at his or her own pace, even if it seems very slow. Encourage the person in your care, even if the exercises seem difficult at first. Watch for signs of fatigue. Always check with the doctor before starting an exercise program.



### Physical Therapy After Illness, Injury or Inactivity

*Physical therapy* is part of the process of relearning how to function after an injury, illness, or period of inactivity. If muscles are not used, they shorten and tighten, making joint motion painful.

A physical therapist treats a person to relieve pain, build up and restore muscle function, and maintain the best possible performance. The therapist does this by using physical means such as active and passive exercise, massage, heat, water, and electricity. A physical therapist sets up the goals of treatment with patient and caregiver and teaches an exercise program, instructs in daily functions, and teaches safe ways to move.

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## 1. Stretching

Regular s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g is the first step, and it can be one of the most enjoyable. Stretching helps muscle rigidity (stiffness). It also helps muscles and joints stay flexible (able to bend). People who are more flexible have an easier time with everyday movement. Stretching increases range of motion of joints and helps with good posture. It protects against muscle strains or sprains, improves circulation, and releases muscle tension.

Stretching can be done at any time. The person in your care can start the day by stretching before getting out of bed. Have the person stretch throughout the day, while watching television or riding in a car.

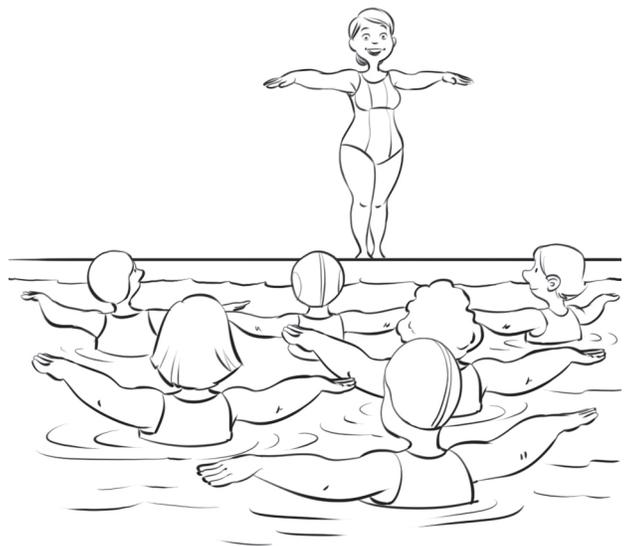
## 2. Strengthening

Muscles often weaken as a result of not being used. Weight training can be a major help in restoring these muscles. Targeted strength training in patients with muscle weakness significantly increases muscle power without any negative effects.

Most physical trainers do *not* have enough special training to work with people with disabilities, but increasingly it is possible to find special needs strength trainers who may be able to help.

## 3. Aerobics

Aerobic activities raise the heart rate and breathing, and promote cardiovascular (heart and lung) fitness. *Water therapy* is a time-tested form of healing. It is also a safe way for a person with a disability and the elderly to exercise because there is no danger of falling. Floating in water allows easy movement and little strain on joints and muscles. For those who have some weakness on one side of the body, water exercises are a good alternative because the affected side floats and feels lighter in water. Using a kickboard or simply walking in place in water may produce aerobic benefit. Water also resists movement so it produces increased heart rate in less time. Talk to a physical therapist about whether a water aerobics class might be appropriate for the person in your care. Aerobic exercise on land for the elderly or people with disabilities is more problematic. An option is chair exercises. These allow the person to remain seated while providing aerobic benefit. Several video products offer complete workouts, as do some TV programs.



## Taking Care of Yourself—Motivation

Motivation is the #1 factor determining whether people change their lifestyles or fail to follow their exercise and diet prescriptions. While motivation is an inside job, the caregiver has a part to play. Do what you can to make exercise fun. Make the new diet an experiment. If you make either diet or exercise too important, any failure becomes that much more significant. Keep it light hearted and join in as much as possible.

No single day of exercise or eating right makes much of a difference in your or your care receiver's health, but 30 days do. Sixty days makes even more of an impact; a year's worth of a new lifestyle will provide remarkable shifts in mood and self-esteem. People who take up the challenge presented by diet and exercise prescriptions make huge strides in their physical and emotional recovery. Imagine what it does to their independence!



### Inspiration

*Comparison is the thief of joy.*  
~ Theodore Roosevelt

## Live Life Laughing!

Aah, remember when we were young and fearless?



## Memory Care

Activities that had meaning to the person with Alzheimer's before he became ill, such as playing baseball with the family, may still be enjoyable if you plan the activity to take into account his remaining strengths and limitations. For example, he may not be able to keep score or follow all the rules, but may be glad to throw the ball. If he used to play tennis, would he enjoy hitting the ball back and forth?

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## ***SAFETY TIPS***—Alzheimer's Safety - Falls

Due to changes in the brain that are caused by Alzheimer's disease (AD), people with AD are at especially high risk of falling. Slower reaction time, difficulty recognizing changes in the height or depth of a step, for example, can lead to tripping and falling. Changes in balance and coordination combined with poor memory can make it difficult for a person with AD to both get from one place to another and avoid hazardous objects at the same time. He may miss a step while looking for a door or trying to listen to someone's conversation. You can reduce the risk of falling by modifying the environment. You can also try to help the person in your care remain as active and flexible as possible.

Before starting any type of exercise routine, get advice from your physician. Start slowly with only moderate effort. Give the senior time to build strength and stamina. Any amount of exercise helps reduce risk, and the benefits of exercise are cumulative, so find a way to make it easy and enjoyable to exercise.

NEXT ISSUE... SUMMER STORM EMERGENCIES - HOT WEATHER SAFETY

# Caregiver Assistance News

“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U ... C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

## Q U I C K Q U I Z

An exercise program needs to match the abilities and limitations of the individual. A physical therapist can design a well-balanced exercise program and with some changes, people at all levels of disability can enjoy the benefits of exercise. Answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Good physical fitness is made up of three types of exercise: stretching, strengthening, and aerobics.  
T F
2. Physical activity burns calories, but it *cannot* also help the person in your care by helping maintain regular bowel and bladder functions.  
T F
3. A person should always stretch before exercise because stretching warms the muscles, helps prevent stiffness, and improves flexibility.  
T F
4. Floating in water allows easy movement and little strain on joints and muscles.  
T F
5. Muscles often weaken as a result of not being used and weight training will *not* help restore weak muscles.  
T F
6. Stretching increases *range of motion* of joints.  
T F
7. Physical activity and good nutrition are perfect partners in good health.  
T F
8. Due to changes in the brain that are caused by Alzheimer’s disease, people with AD are at especially high risk of falling.  
T F
9. People who take up the challenge presented by diet and exercise prescriptions make huge strides in their physical and emotional recovery.  
T F
10. Aerobic exercise on land for the elderly or people with disabilities can be problematic.  
T F

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_