Stretching and Positioning Regime for Lower Limb

Physiotherapy Department
Community & Therapy Services

This leaflet has been designed to remind you of the exercises you have been taught, the correct techniques and who to contact with any queries.
Muscle Tone

Muscle tone is an unconscious low level contraction of your muscles while they are at rest. The purpose of this is to keep your muscles primed and ready to generate movement. Several neurological causes may change a person’s muscle tone to increase or decrease resulting in a lack of movement.

Over time, a lack of movement can cause stiffness, pain, and spasticity. In severe cases this may also lead to contractures.

Spasticity

Spasticity can be defined as a tightening or stiffness of the muscle due to increased muscle tone. It can interfere with normal functioning. It can also greatly increase fatigue.

However, exercise, properly done, is vital in managing spasticity.

The following tips may prove helpful:

- Avoid positions that make the spasticity worse
- Daily stretching of muscles to their full length will help to manage the tightness of spasticity, and allow for optimal movement
- Moving a tight muscle to a new position may result in an increase in spasticity. If this happens, allow a few minutes for the muscles to relax
- When exercising, try to keep head straight
- Sudden changes in spasticity may occur in the presence of infections, skin sores, or even tight shoes or clothing
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**Common Patterns**

**Flexor Pattern**

Common positions include:

- Hips and knees in a bent position
- Hips and knees turned inwards
- Feet pointing in a downward position

Less frequently hips may be turned outwards.

**Extensor Pattern**

Common positions include:

- Hips and knees in straightened position
- Legs close together, or crossed over
- Feet pointing in a downward position

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Positioning

Lying Face Up or ¾ Position
If knees tend to roll inwards try placing a rolled towel or small pillow between the knees. Allow time for the legs to accommodate and relax in the new position.

Correcting Hip Turnout
If hips and knees turn outwards try lying on your back. Place the end of a pillow or large towel under the upper thigh (hip to knee) to align the hips and knees. Knees should be pointing towards the ceiling.

Correcting Foot Turn Down
If the feet and ankles turn downwards it is important position feet and ankles in a neutral position. Toes should be pointing towards the ceiling. A padded foot board is the simplest approach to this. Resting splints may be required but should be discussed with the relevant health professional prior to use.

If you have any concerns in regards to positioning seek the advice of the relevant health professional.
Precautions to the Stretching Regime

- Wear clothing that doesn’t restrict movement
- Ensure the room temperature is comfortably cool
- Don’t force any movement that causes pain or increases spasticity. Some feeling of stretch is fine; pain, numbness or tingling is not
- If pain occurs, stop. Check with your health care professional before trying that move again. If discomfort occurs, cut back to a motion that’s easier
- Go slowly. All movements should be done evenly, allowing the muscles time to respond to the stretch by relaxing
- Moving quickly can increase spasticity or stiffness. Hold each stretch for 30–40 seconds at the comfortable far end of your range
- It may help to count out loud or use a timer. Then gently return to the starting position
- Progress as tolerated. The body will vary from day to day. The idea is to increase the range of pain-free motion. Therefore, it’s important to distinguish between pain and the feeling of stretch. Stretch is okay; pain is not
- A family member or carer may be able to help with stretching. It is important that the support partner knows what they are doing when assisting; otherwise they may be at risk to injuring the patient or themselves
- Avoid over-exertion. Include rest periods, and sip cool water to prevent over-heating or dehydration
**Passive Stretching Programme**

Repeat each exercise 10 times, gradually increasing the range of movement over time. All exercises should be completed 2-3 times daily.

**Hip Flexion / Extension**

Support the leg at the knee and heel, and bring the knee toward the chest. Support the leg at the knee and heel, and bring the heel away from the body towards the ground. Repeat with the other leg. Slight over-pressure can be applied to gently increase the stretch as tolerated by the patient.

**Trunk Rotation**

Bend both knees towards the chest. Support the legs at the knee and rotate the knees slowly from side to side as tolerated, additional support can be applied at the alternate shoulder. Return to starting position.
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Hip Abduction

Support the knees on the inside of the leg and gently move the knees apart. Slight over-pressure can be applied to increase the stretch as tolerated by patient. Allow to return to resting position providing pressure relief between knees if required.

Ankle Flexion

Place one hand on the person’s shin and cup the heel in your other hand. Gently bend the ankle upward by pushing against the bottom of the foot with your forearm. Don’t allow the foot to turn in or out.

Over-pressure can be applied to gently increase the stretch as tolerated by the patient. Allow to return to resting position applying any splints or supports as advised.

Ensure patient comfort at all times and work within individual patient’s limitations. If you experience any difficulties or concern ensure the relevant health care professional is consulted for advice.

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Contact Details for Further Information
Goole Physiotherapy: 03033 302385
Scunthorpe Physiotherapy: 03033 304069
Grimsby Physiotherapy: 03033 304576

Concerns and Queries
If you have any concerns / queries about any of the services offered by the Trust, in the first instance, please speak to the person providing your care.

For Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital – you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01472) 875403 or at the PALS office which is situated near the main entrance.

For Scunthorpe General Hospital – you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01724) 290132 or at the PALS office which is situated on C Floor.

Alternatively you can email:
nlg-tr.PALS@nhs.net

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