



Polymyalgia Rheumatica  
& Giant Cell Arteritis UK

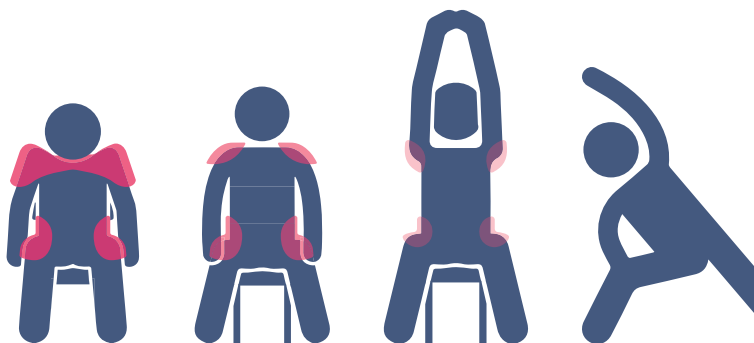
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# Maintaining movement, activity and exercise with PMR:



## A self-help guide



PMR symptoms and mobility can be improved  
with exercise.

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# 0

## INTRODUCTION

**Polymyalgia Rheumatica (PMR)** is a chronic health condition characterised by pain, stiffness and inflammation in the muscles around the shoulders, neck and hips. To date, the cause of PMR remains unknown.

We know that PMR is more common in women, but it is also diagnosed in men. Older people over the age of 65 are typically affected, but it may also be experienced in people much younger. The main treatment is steroid therapy. However, stretching, exercise and keeping active can help alleviate PMR-related symptoms .

It is very likely you will get better in time. By maintaining ongoing activities, staying as active as possible, and by exercising safely, you can keep moving.

This booklet has been co-produced by PMR patients and expert health professionals via a series of focus group discussions. The range of exercises is designed to help you self-manage your PMR. It provides guidance and an opportunity to chart your activity and progress. You can make your own notes on pg 18/19 and share with your healthcare professionals. Start exercising gently, listen to your body and try not to overdo it – be kind to yourself.

# 1

## TIP 1: Keep moving. Avoid sitting for long periods

### • BEGINNER LEVEL

People who currently struggle to regularly exercise, or those with limited mobility should start from this section.

### INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED LEVEL

People who already regularly exercise and have good mobility, may want to go straight to Section 2 ●● (page 8).

### • Starting exercise with PMR

- **Get up, stretch and move** every half hour, even if it's only walking to your front door.
- **Start slowly** and gently build up; go at your own speed.
- **Gentle stretches** moving your whole body are especially helpful in PMR.
- **Try to stretch** as far as you comfortably can, holding the same movement for up to 20 seconds. (Use an alarm or your phone to time yourself).
- **Start with just a few minutes** of exercise at a time (in total) and gradually increase the time up to a minute per exercise.

Research informs us that movements and exercise can help by:



1. Improving mood



2. Improving flexibility



3. Improving general fitness



4. Improving mobility



5. Reducing stiffness, pain and fatigue



6. Reducing the risk of falls and steroid-related fractures

### Next steps

- Keep doing your usual activities, especially walking which helps to keep your bones strong, as this is particularly important if you are taking steroids. You may start with a short (few minutes) walk. That's a great start.
- Keep doing all activities you enjoy e.g., swimming, golf, yoga, Pilates etc, but if you find something particularly difficult, ask the teacher/ instructor for alternatives.
- If you have stiffness and muscle aches the exercises on page 6/7 can help you.

## Stretching exercises reduce stiffness

### Instructions

For each stretch, go as far as you comfortably can, then hold the stretch for up to 20 seconds. Start by repeating each exercise x 5, at least twice a day.

### BEGINNER



#### 1. Neck rotation

Slowly turn your head as far as you comfortably can to the left and right.

**REMEMBER:** If you experience any dizziness with neck rotations, stop doing this exercise.



#### 2. Hip stretches\*

In a seated position lift each leg separately and gently pull your knee towards your chest.

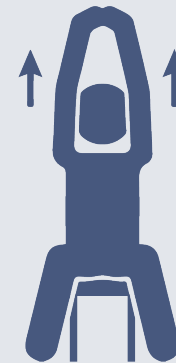
\*(Bend only as far as you have been advised to if you have had a hip replacement).

## Stretching exercises reduce stiffness



#### 3. Shoulder shrug

Slowly lift your shoulders up and down. Then pull shoulder blades together to stretch your chest.



#### 4. Arm raises

Lift your arms above your head and reach upwards towards the ceiling.



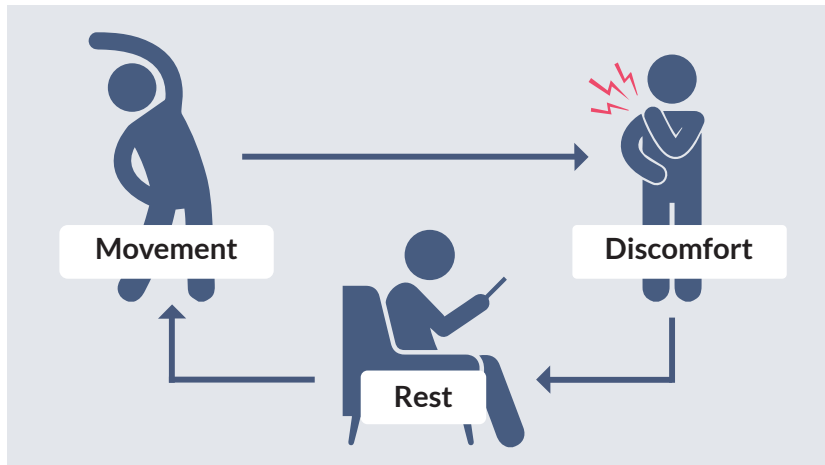
#### 5. Shoulder stretch

Lift arms as Exercise 4. Rest hands behind your head, pulling elbows backwards. Hold the stretch. Slide arms down from your head towards your waist. Join your hands behind your back reaching as far up your back as you can. Hold the stretch.

# 2

## TIP 2: Tune in to your body

Continue with your regular routine noticing how your body feels while you move. You may feel achy after activity, especially in muscles that haven't been exercised for a while.



- If discomfort sets in, you may need to temporarily reduce the amount of time you are moving and exercising. Try halving the amount you did.
- If that is a comfortable amount, then gradually increase the daily exercises you do over the next week. This will help you to get back to previous exercise levels, until you don't get any unusual after-effects of exercising.

## Managing the ups and downs

- Living with PMR can be unpredictable, so...
  - **Be patient with yourself:** you may need to cut back compared to what you did before your PMR diagnosis, and you will gradually make progress.
  - **Try noting your activity** in a journal or exercise diary to help you monitor your daily activity and help you plan ahead.
  - Remember that **social engagements, work and housework** all need to be considered as activity as this all affects your energy levels.
- There will be days when your body won't allow you to be as active, so **know when to rest.**
- **Be flexible** with your activity plan.
- **Expect setbacks** and times when your symptoms seem worse; this is normal with PMR.
- **Enjoy moving,** stretching, and exercise, it will help manage your symptoms.

# 3

## TIP 3: Balance activity with rest

### Expect slow and gradual progress:

- Remember slow and steady leads to improvement.
- Know your own body and get the balance right.
- This isn't easy to get right so be patient with yourself.
- Try to still do some activity, even on a down day.
- Try to focus on your progress over a month, rather than a week or day.



### Pacing your activity levels:

- Pacing activity is very important to help you work out how much you can do even on a bad day.
- Don't be tempted to do more than you had planned, even if you are having a good day.
- To work out your baseline activity, it helps to keep an activity diary. This should include everything physical, mental, sitting or standing that takes your energy.
- By logging the time of day against your activities or exercise (see pages 18/19), you will be able to see if there is a pattern to what affects your symptoms.



Once you know what your activity baseline is, you can use that to gradually build up your activity levels. If you get a flare up of your PMR symptoms, you will be able to reduce your activity using the same diary principles and then build up again slowly.

# 4

## TIP 4: Exercise helps lift mood in PMR





- Continue your daily routine and activities, like walking the dog. Even short walks, especially if with others, can be helpful to improve mood.
- Try yoga, Pilates, swimming, tai chi, or any other forms of exercise you enjoy. All forms of gentle exercise can help you feel better mentally, as well as physically.

### Progressing exercise when PMR symptoms are well controlled:

Some people notice their energy levels dip when they start to slowly reduce their steroids. If so, you need to temporarily reduce your planned activity. For example, reduce the distance you were planning to walk, but still try and do some activity. Gradually you will be able to build your exercise back up again.

Once your activity levels have increased again you can begin some simple muscle strengthening and balance exercises. This will not only improve your flexibility, but also help with balance and general fitness levels. Remember you don't need any special strengthening equipment; holding a tin of beans or a small bottle of water can be just as effective as weights.

### Patients' experience of exercise:

- The following quotations are from patients with PMR about their experience after their diagnosis:
  -  **Female, 59:**  
"Walking my dog was the only thing that cheered me up".
  -  **Male, 76:**  
"The temptation is to just sit about".
  -  **Female, 72:**  
"Exercise makes me feel better... it keeps me going".
  -  **Female, 82:**  
"If I didn't exercise, I would be even worse".
- It is important to know you are not experiencing PMR alone; there are many others going through a similar experience. With the help of regular movement, stretching, and exercise, you can, over time, become more active, improve your quality of life living with PMR and limit other complications from reduced mobility.
- If you feel ready to work on strength and your overall fitness, the exercises on **page 14/15** can help you.

## Strength, fitness and balance exercises

### Instructions

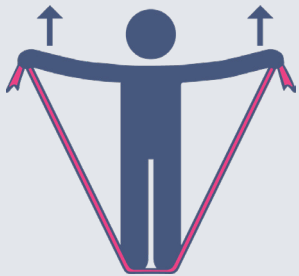
Start by repeating each intermediate exercise x5, slowly building up over a month to 20 repetitions every day

### INTERMEDIATE



#### 1. Arm curls

Either sitting or standing, holding a filled water bottle/hand weight, slowly bend your elbow towards your shoulder and slowly lower.



#### 2. Lateral arm raises

With or without an exercise band, slowly lift your arms out to the side. Hold for 5-10 seconds, then slowly lower.



#### 3. Standing hip extension

Stretch your hip by taking your leg backwards. Hold, for 5-10 seconds, then swap legs.

## Strength, fitness and balance exercises



#### 4. Standing up and sitting down

Slowly sit down into a chair then immediately slowly stand up again.

### ADVANCED



#### 5. Stair step ups

Hold the wall/a rail, step up onto the first step with both feet, then step down. Repeat for 30 seconds, or until moderately breathless, for up to a few minutes, twice a day.



#### 6. Squats against wall

With your back supported against the wall, bend your knees and slowly lower yourself, as if sitting down on a chair. Hold for 10 seconds, building up to 60 seconds and repeating x3 once a day.



# 5

## TIP 5: Be alert to your symptoms returning

### Symptom checking:

- Steroids control, but may also mask your symptoms. However, you still have PMR. So, as you reduce your steroids, remember it is not uncommon to experience some of the same symptoms you had when you were first diagnosed.
- As you get stronger and more active, you may also feel extra tired again. Listen to your body and try and work out if this is your PMR getting worse, or just muscle soreness from exercising and becoming more active again.
- If this tiredness is related to more activity, just reduce your activity a bit for a few days, then gradually build it up again over the next week.
- If you think the tiredness is from your PMR, then get in touch with the health professionals looking after you and get their advice.

Finally, many say “PMR is life changing”... but be assured... you can feel much better in yourself by managing PMR through movement and exercise.

## FURTHER HELP AND ADVICE

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### PMRGCAuk website:

<https://pmrgca.org.uk/>

### Age UK – Exercise page:

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/exercise/simple-exercises-inactive-adults/>

### Chair Yoga for older people:

<https://f.hubspotusercontent30.net/hubfs/5835435/Chair%20Yoga%20Illustrations%202021-1.pdf>

EXERCISE DIARY/NOTES:

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EXERCISE DIARY/NOTES:

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**Please give us your feedback about this booklet** by typing in the link or scanning the QR code below to open our questionnaire:

<https://forms.office.com/e/XLuzYHgBJG>

