

# Exercises to strengthen your muscles



Staying in the hospital, taking certain medications, or other situations can cause muscle “wasting” and loss of strength. Here are some simple exercises you can do at home. They will help you regain your muscle tone.



Before you begin the exercises described in this brochure, ask a member of your health care team if you can do them.

## Is it normal that I have less strength?

Different causes can lead to muscle wasting and loss of strength:

- physical inactivity
- a health problem
- aging
- certain medications or treatments

Loss of strength makes it difficult to do daily activities, such as getting up from a low chair or climbing stairs. A reduction in the volume of one or more muscles is called “muscle atrophy”.

## Why should I do these exercises?

The exercises will strengthen your muscles and give you:

- more autonomy
- better balance, with less risk of falling
- stronger bones
- more energy
- a more effective immune system

## Are there any contraindications to these exercises?

There are not many. These exercises can usually be done even if you have joint, muscle, or tendon problems (such as osteoarthritis, tendonitis, etc.). They are often even recommended for treating many of these problems. However, if you are in doubt, talk to a member of your health care team.





## DID YOU KNOW?

**Staying in the hospital quickly causes muscle loss.**

It takes about :

- 3 days to recover the muscle mass lost from spending 1 day in bed in the hospital
- 3 weeks to recover the muscle mass lost from spending 1 week in bed in the hospital

**Not enough time?  
Use time spent in front of the television to do the exercises.**

To increase the intensity, follow the instructions. This involves changing the movements or redoing the exercises by adding small weights (2 pounds, 3 pounds, or 5 pounds). You can buy these weights in a sports shop. Otherwise, canned goods or bottles of water can do the trick.

## How often should I do the exercises?

### In the beginning

Start gently. Listen to your body. We suggest:

- doing the exercises 2 or 3 times per day
- holding the positions for 2 to 5 seconds, and doing each exercise 5 to 10 times



### IMPORTANT

Don't hold your breath during the exercises.

### To go further

In each of the exercises illustrated in this brochure, there is a section "To increase the intensity". Move on to this step when you can:

- do 3 series per day
- do 10 repetitions without difficulty
- do the exercises feeling less strain on your muscles



## Is it normal for me to feel muscle fatigue during exercise?

As with any physical exercise, you may feel your muscles getting tired. Take breaks if necessary.

If the fatigue is too much, make your sessions shorter or less frequent (or both), depending on what you can tolerate. It can also help to do these exercises at the time of day when you have the most energy.



## Is there anything else I can do to regain my muscle mass?

Moving and exercising your muscles during the day is a great way to maintain or regain muscle mass. Besides doing your exercises at home, you can shovel, garden, carry grocery bags or a backpack, etc.

Cardiovascular exercises such as walking and cycling are also excellent! Start slowly. For example, you can start by doing 3 to 5 exercise sessions a week for about 10 to 15 minutes each time.

After that, you can increase the intensity. Ideally, you should do about two and a half hours of exercise per week. Choose activities you enjoy. Community centres often offer courses that are very interesting.



**Measure your effort. The right intensity is the one that allows you to keep talking while you exercise.**

You can also do Nordic walking. This involves hiking with poles similar to those used in cross-country skiing. It exercises all the muscles of your body and improves your cardiovascular capacity. Also, if you lack balance, the sticks will give valuable support.

## Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

Don't hesitate to contact a member of your health care team.



### USEFUL RESOURCES

This site explains the basic technique for Nordic walking and presents a short video:  
> [nordicacademy.com.au](http://nordicacademy.com.au)

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site  
[chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante](http://chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante)

*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*

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### ELBOW EXTENSION



#### Starting position

Sitting in a chair with armrests, hands on the armrests.



#### Action

Lift yourself up by pushing on the armrests and unfolding your elbows. Be careful. Keep your back straight and use your legs to keep your balance.



#### To increase the intensity

Help yourself with your legs as little as possible.

### KNEE EXTENSIONS



#### Starting position

Sitting, with feet about a shoulder width apart, arms crossed over the chest.



#### Action

Tilt your torso forward and stand up from the chair. Hold still briefly, then sit back down. Be careful. Bend from your hips and keep your back straight. Sit down slowly.



#### To increase the intensity

Do the exercise standing in front of a table or countertop. Place your hands on the table. Bend your knees as if you were sitting down. Another option: use weights, holding one in each hand.



## HIP FLEXION



**Starting position**  
Sitting, with feet about a shoulder width apart.



**Action**  
Lift one leg while keeping the knee bent. Alternate from one leg to the other. Be careful. Don't move your back.



**To increase the intensity**  
Do the exercise standing upright with your hands resting on a table or countertop. Lift one leg, with the knee bent. Another option: do it standing upright without support.

## FOOT FLEXION 1



**Starting position**  
Sitting, with both feet on the floor.



**Action**  
Lift your toes as much as possible while keeping your heels on the ground. Be careful. Keep your back straight.



**To increase the intensity**  
Do the exercise standing upright, placing your hands on a countertop or table to help keep your balance.

## FOOT FLEXION 2



### Starting position

Sitting, with both feet on the floor.



### Action

Lift your heels as much as possible while keeping your toes on the ground. Be careful. Keep your back straight.



### To increase the intensity

Do the exercise standing upright, placing your hands on a countertop or table to help keep your balance.

## PELVIC LIFT



### Starting position

Lying on your back, with arms extended beside your torso, knees bent and feet on the floor, feet and knees slightly apart.



### Action

Raise your pelvis off the floor as high as possible. Hold this position for 2 seconds. Slowly lower your pelvis back down to the floor. Be careful. Don't bend your back.



### To increase the intensity

Cross your arms over your chest.

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Questions

Write down any questions you want to ask your care team so you don't forget anything.



Lined area for writing questions



Observations - Comments

Write down observations you feel are important : your symptoms, treatments, follow-up, energy level, spirit, etc.



Lined area for writing observations and comments



Upcoming appointments

Lined area for writing upcoming appointments

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