

My exercise programme

Your exercise session has three parts:

1. warming up

2. main exercises

3. cooling down and stretching

Your main exercise may be aerobic exercise, strengthening or balance exercises, or a mixture.

Hold on to a secure surface if you need to steady yourself during any of the exercises.

Exercise levels

The important thing is to exercise at the right level for you. All the exercises are shown at level 1. If you feel happy doing them, we've also suggested ways you could do more in levels 2 and 3.



Exercises marked with a star are also good for improving your coordination and balance.

Warm up

Try to warm up for 5-10 minutes. The aim is to gently move your joints and gradually raise your heart rate to increase the blood flow to your heart, lungs, and muscles. This gets your body ready for exercise and reduces the risk of injuring yourself or getting suddenly

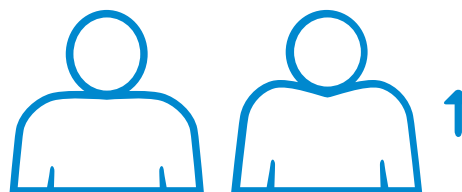
breathless. Towards the end of the warm-up you should feel slightly short of breath and a bit warmer.

You can do the warm-up either sitting or standing, whichever is right for you.

Shoulder shrugs

3 times up and down

Slowly lift your shoulders towards your ears then lower them down again.



Shoulder circles

3 times each direction

Keep your arms down by your side, if standing, or on your lap if you're sitting. Slowly move your shoulders round in a circle backwards two to four times, then forwards two to four times.



Head turns

3 times each side

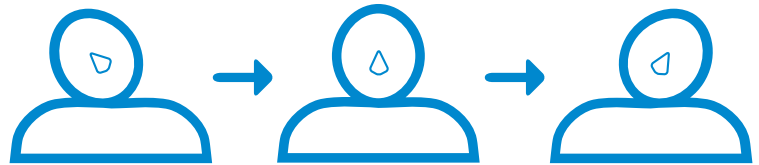
Slowly turn your head to the right. Bring your head back to the centre, then slowly turn to the left.



Head side bends

3 times each side

Slowly move your head down to the right, gently bringing your ear towards your right shoulder. Don't lift your shoulder up to meet your ear. Bring your head up to the middle. Repeat to the left.



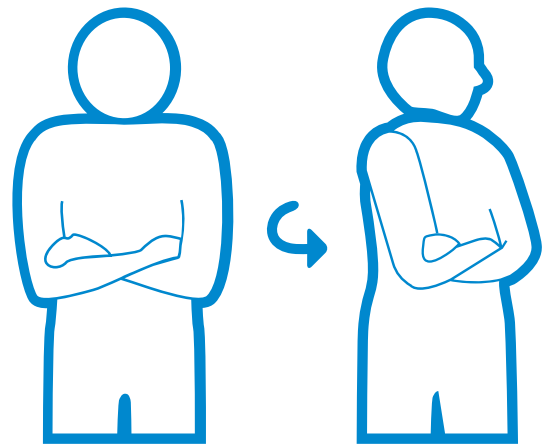
Trunk twists

3 times each side

Sit in a chair or stand with your feet apart and your arms folded in front of you.

Keep your hips still and facing forwards throughout this exercise.

Turn your shoulders, arms and head around to the right. Come back to the centre and then turn to the left. Make sure you twist from the waist – don't just move your arms side to side.

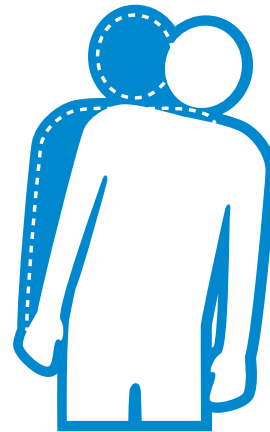


Side bends

3 times each side

Either standing or sitting, keep your body straight with your arms by your sides.

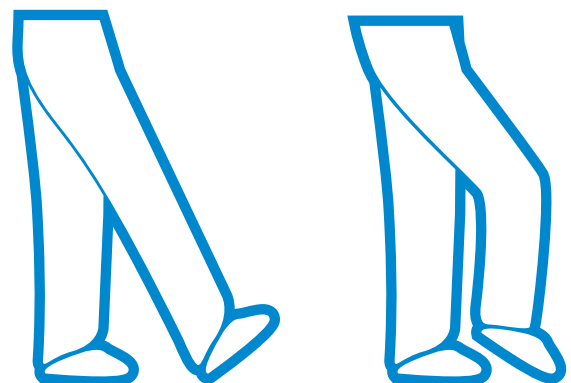
Slide one arm a short way towards the floor, bending sideways. Don't lean forwards or backwards at all. Return to your starting position, and repeat to the other side.



Ankle bends

3 times each leg

Either standing or sitting and using one foot at a time, alternately tap your toes and then your heel on the ground in front of you. Repeat with the other foot.



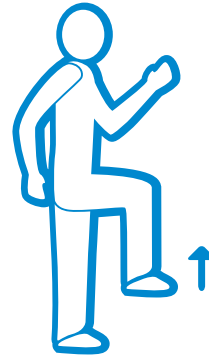
Warm up your heart and your muscles

This part of the warm-up should make you slightly out of breath. Stand to do these exercises if you can. You may need to hold on to a chair or use a wall for support and balance.

Knee lifts

Up to 1 minute

Slowly lift one knee up, to no higher than to your hip, then slowly lower again. Repeat with the other leg.



Heel digs forwards

Up to 1 minute

Tap one heel on the floor in front of you. Place your feet back together again and repeat with the other leg.



Toe taps behind

Up to 1 minute

Keep your body upright, take one foot out behind you and tap your toes on the floor. Bring your foot back to the middle and repeat with the other leg.



Finish your warm-up with gentle marching on the spot for one minute or until your breathing has returned to normal.

Aerobic exercises

Your exercise session has three parts:

1. warming up
2. main exercises
3. cooling down and stretching

Your main exercise may be aerobic exercise, strengthening or balance exercises, or a mixture.

If you have an exercise trainer, ask them which exercises are best for you – you may not need to do them all.

Aim for at least 10 minutes and remember to warm up and cool down!

Start your aerobic exercise gently and build up as you get more confident. Start with whatever you can do, maybe 1, 2, 5 or even 10 minutes. When you can do this comfortably, increase the time little by little each week, until you can do 30 minutes. You can do them in one go, or if 30 minutes is too long for you, stick to 5 or 10 minutes at a time and try to do several sessions a day.

tip

It's recommended we do 150 minutes of aerobic activity a week. This can be spread by doing about 20 minutes every day, or 30 minutes on five days a week. But if this feels like too much, any activity is better than none.

1. Walking

Walking is a great way to do aerobic exercise as it can easily be part of your day-to-day activities and can be done anywhere, at any time. Ideally try walking a little every day.

- If you use a mobility aid, such as a walking frame, use it when you walk.
- If you prefer to stay indoors, use a corridor or walk between two places in your home to build up your confidence with walking.
- You can record your walks using our walking record

Warm up by starting slowly and gradually build up your speed.

To get the most benefit, aim to reach a walking pace that's brisk for you and makes you moderately out of breath. Use the talk test on page 17 to check. Walk at this speed for as long as you can. Time your walk.

Aim to walk briskly for 10 minutes at first. When you're comfortable doing this, walk for a bit longer each week. When you can walk for 10 to 20 minutes, try increasing increase your speed.

If this feels like too much, walk briskly for as long as you can and build up the time gradually as you gain fitness.

When you are near the end of your walk, gradually slow your speed to cool down.

Walking and exercising dos and don'ts

Do	Don't
Carry your reliever inhaler and/or GTN spray, if you have them. Use them as advised by your health care professional if you need them	Forget to take inhalers and GTN spray with you if you use them
Walk inside or try another aerobic exercise if you can't get out – examples are included in this section	Avoid exercising because the weather is bad or you're not in the mood!
Drink plenty of clear fluids – water or hot teas	Walk after a large meal
Cool down gradually when you've finished exercising – slow your walking speed or do the cooldown exercises	Stop suddenly without cooling down
Walk at the right speed so you are moderately breathless. Pace yourself when you walk on slopes and hills	Walk until you feel ready to drop or are too breathless to speak
Increase your walking time or speed gradually	Record a stroll as your training walk. You need to walk as briskly and for as long as you can to benefit
Use a stick or other walking aid if you need it	Walk or exercise alone if you feel unsteady
Hold on when doing the exercises below if you need to for safety	Take any risks with your safety!
Make sure any object you hold or sit on is stable and won't tip over	Use chairs or other objects that are not stable or fixed safely

Other aerobic exercises

On the next page, there are some more aerobic exercises you can do as well as walking – or instead of walking. Time all these exercises with a clock or stopwatch, as the aim is to increase the length of time you do them.

tip

You should feel moderately out of breath. Use the talk test on page 17 if you're unsure.

If you get too breathless, use the breathing positions at [blf.org.uk/breathlessness](https://www.blf.org.uk/breathlessness) to recover.

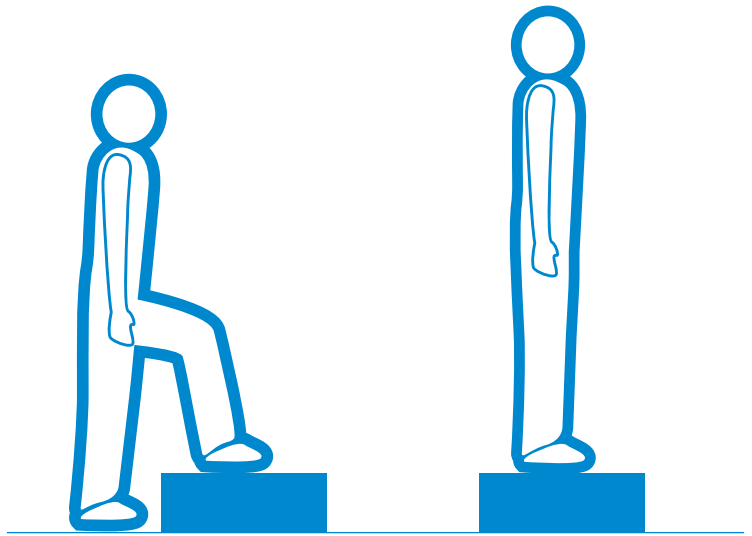
2. Step-ups

Stand in front of a step about six inches high, such as the bottom stair. Step up onto the step with one foot, then bring your other foot up to join it. Step back down again with your first foot and then the other one.

Level 1 – Repeat rhythmically, maintaining a steady pace. The rhythm should be like marching – right, left, right, left. After every 10, swap over to start the step-ups with your other leg.

Level 2 – increase the length of time or the speed of stepping up and down.

Level 3 – try carrying weights as you step up and down as if you were holding shopping.

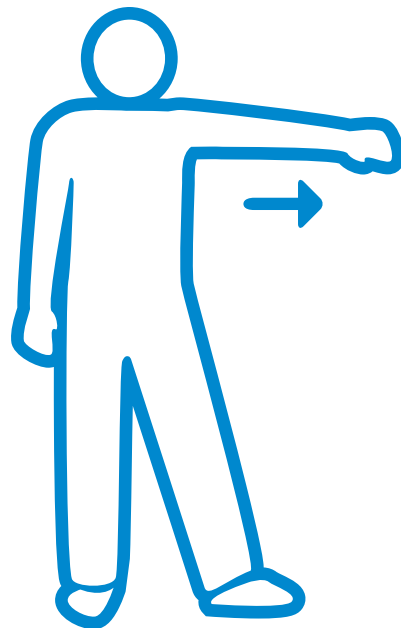


3. Star jacks

Level 1 – Tap your right leg out to the side. Bring your leg back to the middle. Repeat with your left leg. Try to keep a steady rhythm. If you get breathless, you can lean on the back of a chair.

Level 2 – raise your right arm out to the side as you tap your right foot, and bring your arm back to your side as you bring your leg back to the middle. Then use your left leg and arm together in the same way.

Level 3 – increase the length of time or the speed of exercise. Add a wrist or ankle weight.



4. Marching on the spot

Level 1 – March on the spot indoors.

Level 2 – add arm swings.

Level 3 – increase the time you spend marching or how quickly you march.

Exercise levels

The important thing is to exercise at the right level for you. All the exercises are shown at level 1. If you feel happy doing them, we've also suggested ways you could do more in levels 2 and 3.

Strengthening or resistance exercises



Exercises marked with a star are also good for improving your coordination and balance.

Each exercise is done in sets of 10. We recommend you build up to a maximum of three sets for each exercise, resting for up to a minute between sets. So, the most you ever need to do of any strengthening exercise is 30 – or three times ten. Rest for at least a day between doing strength exercises.

Strong muscles increase your ability to be independent in your daily life, such as carrying shopping, gardening, doing DIY or climbing stairs.

Your muscles should feel they have worked somewhat hard after the first set of 10, and very hard after the last set. When you can do three sets easily, use a heavier weight next time. Your exercise trainer can help you get the best weight or resistance for you to begin with.

You may not feel short of breath when you do these exercises. They should make your muscles feel somewhat tired, rather than making you short of breath.

It is important to work hard enough to get your muscles stronger.

- Reduce the weight or resistance if you feel it's too hard
- Increase the weight or resistance if you find the exercise too easy

Always aim keep your body strong and steady during these exercises. Be careful not to bend backwards. Do all the exercises slowly and precisely to get the most out of them.

tip

Getting breathless?

Blow as you go: Time your breaths in and out to reduce the effort.

Breathe OUT on the hardest part of the exercise, for example, when you lift up your arms or a weight, or when you move your body, like stepping up or standing up, or taking your leg out to the side. Breathe IN as you relax and return to the start position.

Also remember the breathing positions at blf.org.uk/breathlessness



People with a lung condition have weak muscles because they are less active. This can make them even more breathless when they move, so simple activities feel hard. Strengthening exercises address this problem and have many benefits. These include being able to walk further, feeling fitter and less breathless, and being more confident with everyday life.

Julie, respiratory physiotherapist

tip

Remember to do each exercise in sets of 10. Aim for a maximum of 3 sets.

5. Sit to stand *

Level 1 – Use a sturdy chair with a back, such as a dining room chair. Sit forwards. Lean forward slightly, with your nose over your toes, and stand up slowly.

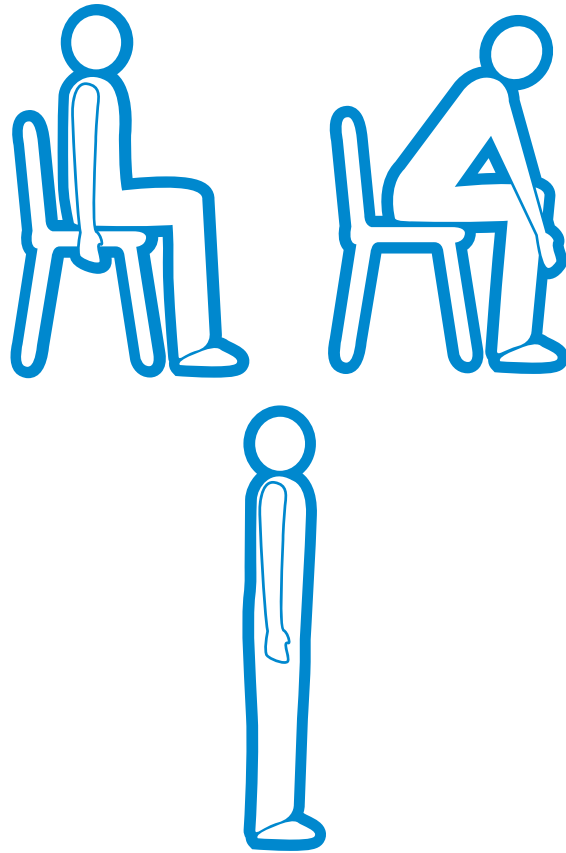
Sit back down slowly, aiming for perfect control.

The slower you can do this exercise the better. Make sure you keep your feet on the floor at all times.

If you can't stand up from the chair without using your arms, you can push with your arms to help.

Level 2 – do the exercise from a lower chair and make it even slower – like slow motion.

Level 3 – hold weights in your hands by your sides or a heavy book close to your chest. If you don't have weights, you could take a plastic container with a handle and fill it with water.



6. Wall push-offs

Level 1 – Stand facing a wall with your feet slightly apart about 1 foot away from the wall.

Place your hands on the wall at shoulder height.

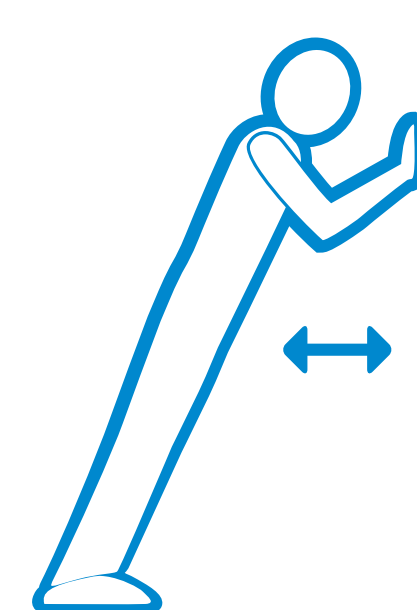
Keep your body straight at all times, from your head to your tail bone.

Slowly bend your elbows, taking your body closer to the wall.

Pause for a moment and then push back to your starting position.

Level 2 – stand further away from the wall.

Level 3 – do the exercise on tiptoes.

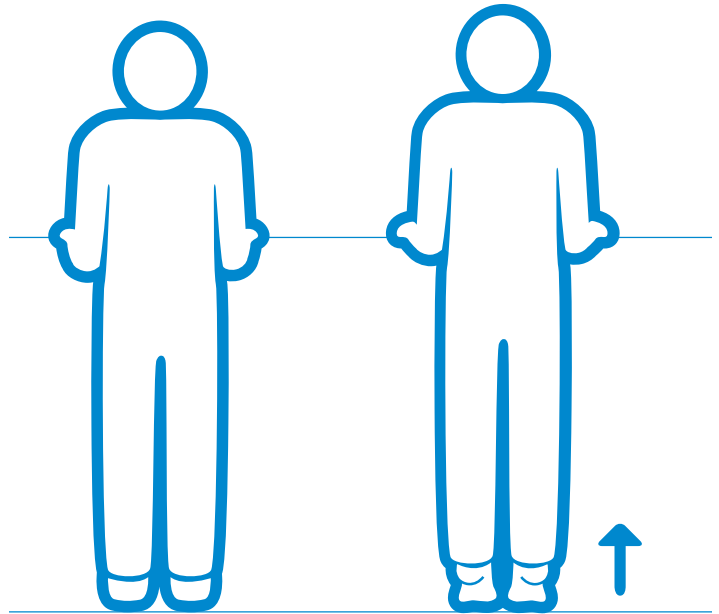


7. Heel raises *

Level 1 – Very gently rest your hands on a sturdy surface to help you balance, without putting any weight through your hands. Slowly rise up onto your tiptoes, then slowly lower down again.

Level 2 – Lower your heels in stages as you count slowly to four.

Level 3 – Stand on one leg at a time.



8. Arm punches

Level 1 – Sit or stand with your arms by your side. Bring your hands up to your chest.

Now straighten your arms out in front of you (position A).

Bring your hands back to your chest.

Repeat this action, going a little higher each time (positions B and C) until you are reaching up high as if you were reaching up to a high shelf.

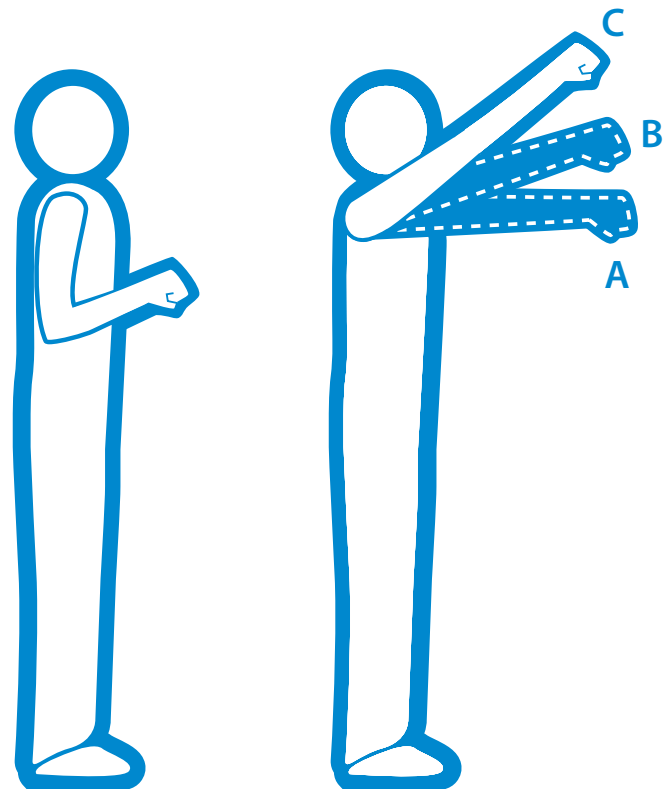
Then repeat it exactly in reverse, coming lower each time. Bring your hands back to your chest each time.

Finally, bring your hands back down to your sides.

You may find once is enough to start with.

Level 2 – hold a small weight in your hand – start with 0.5kg.

Level 3 – increase the weight as you feel ready.



9. Squats *

Level 1 – Stand with your feet slightly apart with your hands resting on the back of a sturdy chair or a table top.

Keeping your back straight, slowly bend your knees as far as you feel comfortable. Do not let them stick out further than your toes.

Make sure your hips stay higher than your knees, and your whole back is upright and not bent.

Pause for a moment, then slowly straighten your knees, returning to your starting position.

Level 2 – don't use a chair and bend your knees a little deeper.

Level 3 – hold weights in your hands down by your sides or a heavy book close to your chest.



10. Bicep curls

Level 1 – Sit and rest your elbows on a table. Hold weights in your hands with your palms facing upwards. If you don't have weights, you could take a plastic container and fill it with water.

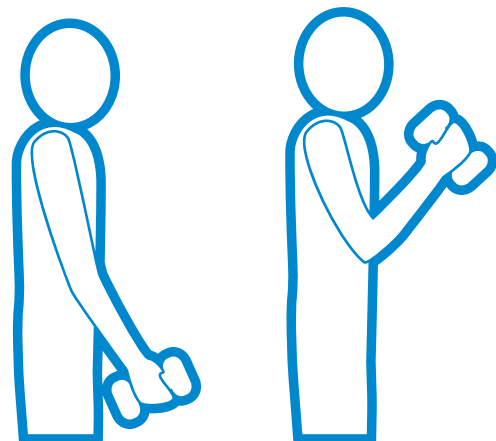
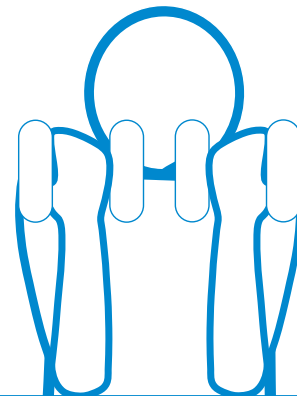
Gently bend one elbow, bringing the weight up towards your shoulder.

Slowly straighten your arm again and repeat with the other arm.

Breathe out as you lift the weight up and breathe in as you lower it.

Level 2 – stand to do the exercise and start with arms down by your side.

Level 3 – use both arms at the same time or increase the weight.



Exercises marked with a star are also good for improving your coordination and balance.

11. Hip extensions *

Level 1 – These are tiny movements. You should feel them in the muscles of your bottom and the back of your thigh.

Stand with your right leg slightly behind you, resting the ball of your foot on the ground. Keep your knee straight.

Gently lift your right foot one inch off the ground behind you. Keep your body upright and your leg straight.

Pause for a moment, then slowly lower your leg back down again. Repeat with your other leg.

Level 2 – hold the position for longer.

Level 3 – add an ankle weight.



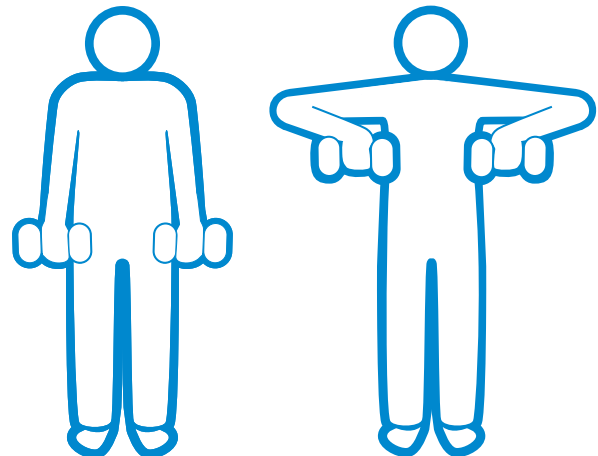
12. Upright rows

Level 1 – Sit or stand with your arms by your side. Hold weights in your hands, your palms downwards.

With your elbows out to the side, raise both your arms up to your shoulders and down again. Breathe out as you bring your arms up and breathe in as you lower them.

Level 2 – increase weight and stand.

Level 3 – increase weight again.



13. Knee extensions

Level 1 – Sit on a chair, feet side by side. Keeping your thighs on the chair, straighten one leg out in front at a time, bending at your knee.

Lower your foot back to its starting position.

Repeat up to 10 times with one leg.

Repeat with the other leg.

Level 2 – pause for three seconds when your leg is straight.

Level 3 – add an ankle weight - unless your skin is fragile or damaged.



Exercises for balance and coordination

Remember to do each exercise in sets of 10. Aim for a maximum of 3 sets.

***** Exercises marked with a star are good for improving your coordination and balance.

These exercises will help your balance and coordination. They are simple, but you'll need to concentrate to do them properly. They should not feel easy.

They focus on muscles surrounding your pelvis and spine – your core. These muscles are very important. They support your back and help reduce the chances of back problems.

14. Leg slides to the side *

Face a stable surface, like a table or kitchen counter top, and stand with your feet together.

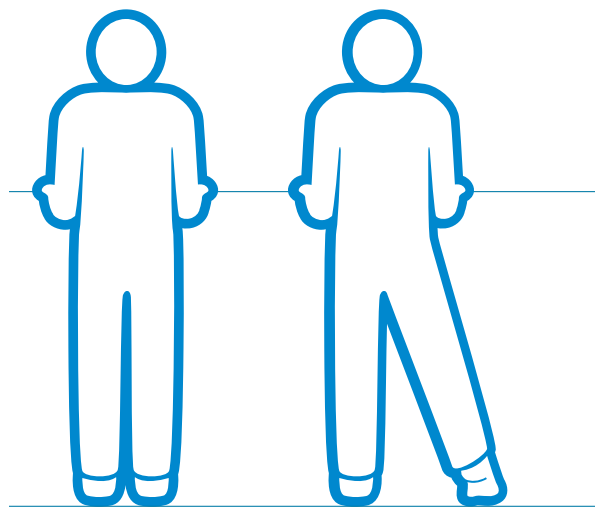
Press your hands firmly down on the surface, as if you were pushing yourself taller. Don't raise your shoulders. At the same time, slide one leg out a few inches to the side. Keep your toes facing forwards.

Bring the leg back to the middle, then relax your arms.

Level 1 – do this five times on each leg.

Level 2 – do this 10 times on each leg.

Level 3 – add an ankle weight.



15. Mini knee lifts *

This exercise works your inner tummy and back muscles without you knowing it.

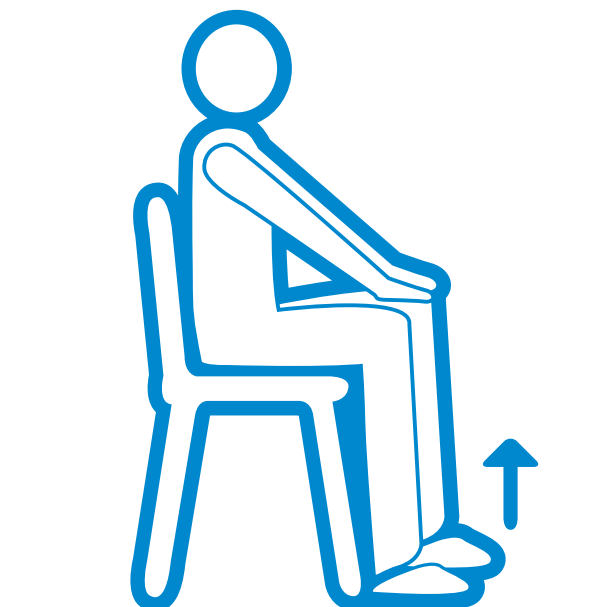
Level 1 – Sit up straight with your bottom near the front of your chair and your feet flat on the floor. You should feel your weight on the two prominent bones in your bottom – your sitting bones. Place your hands on your knees.

Now lift one foot about half an inch off the floor, then slowly place on the floor again.

Repeat using the other foot.

Level 2 – hold your arms out to the side.

Level 3 – add a small weight to your ankle.



Cool down and stretch

To finish your exercise session safely, cool down so your heart rate gradually returns to normal. The cool-down involves moving your joints and gently stretching the muscles you've used when exercising.

Cool down until your heart rate and breathing have both returned to normal.

Walking or gentle marching on the spot

A good way to start cooling down is to walk slowly around the room as you come to the end of your exercise. Or you could march slowly on the spot, for about two minutes.

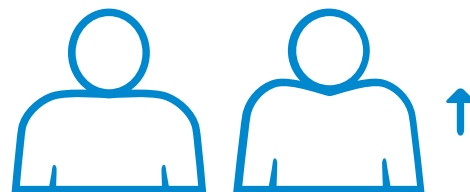
Moving your joints

You can do this by doing the first few warm-up exercises of the neck and shoulders:

Shoulder shrugs

3 times up and down

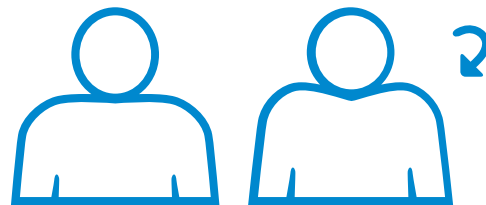
Slowly lift your shoulders towards your ears then lower them down again.



Shoulder circles

3 times each direction

Keep your arms down by your side, if standing, or on your lap if you're sitting. Slowly move your shoulders round in a circle backwards two to four times, then forwards two to four times.



Head turns

3 times each side

Slowly turn your head to the right. Bring your head back to the centre, then slowly turn to the left.



Head side bends

3 times each side

Slowly move your head down to the right, gently bringing your ear towards your right shoulder. Don't lift your shoulder up to meet your ear. Bring your head up to the middle. Repeat to the left.



Stretches

Now it's time to stretch.

Stretching helps to reduce any aching or soreness you may feel in your muscles in the day or two after exercise. Stretching also improves your flexibility. None of these stretches should be painful – you should just feel a slight stretch.

If you can't do every stretch here, just do the ones you can. If you did pulmonary rehabilitation or another exercise class, do the stretches you were shown by your trainer.

Try to hold each stretch for 15-30 seconds. You can stand or sit to stretch.

Side stretch

Stand or sit with your feet apart. Reach your right arm up to the ceiling, then lean over slightly to the left. You should feel a slight stretch down the right-hand side of your body.

Return to the starting position and repeat with the left arm.



Tricep or shoulder stretch

Put your right arm out in front of you then, keeping your arm straight, bring it across your body at shoulder height.

Use your left hand to squeeze your right arm towards you until you feel a slight stretch around your right shoulder and the back of your upper arm.

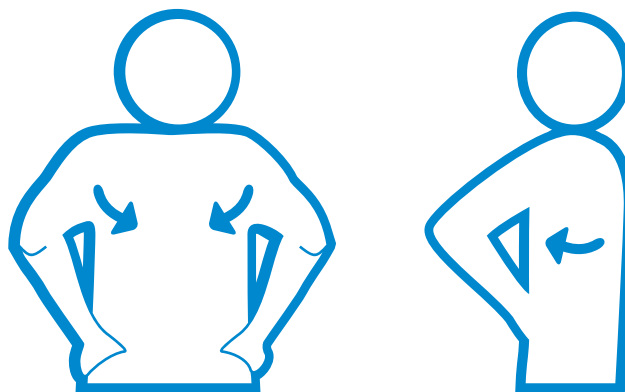
Repeat with the left arm.



Chest stretch

Sit or stand up tall. Place your hands on the lower part of your back or hips.

Pull your shoulders back and squeeze your elbows together behind you. You should feel a slight stretch in the muscles across the front of your chest.



Reminder. Try to hold each stretch for 15-30 seconds.

Hamstring stretch

Sit on the edge of a chair, with your back straight and feet flat on the floor. Place your right leg out in front of you, keeping it straight.

Place your hands on your left thigh for support.

Bend forwards slightly from your hips, keeping your back straight, until you can feel a slight stretch down the back of the right leg.

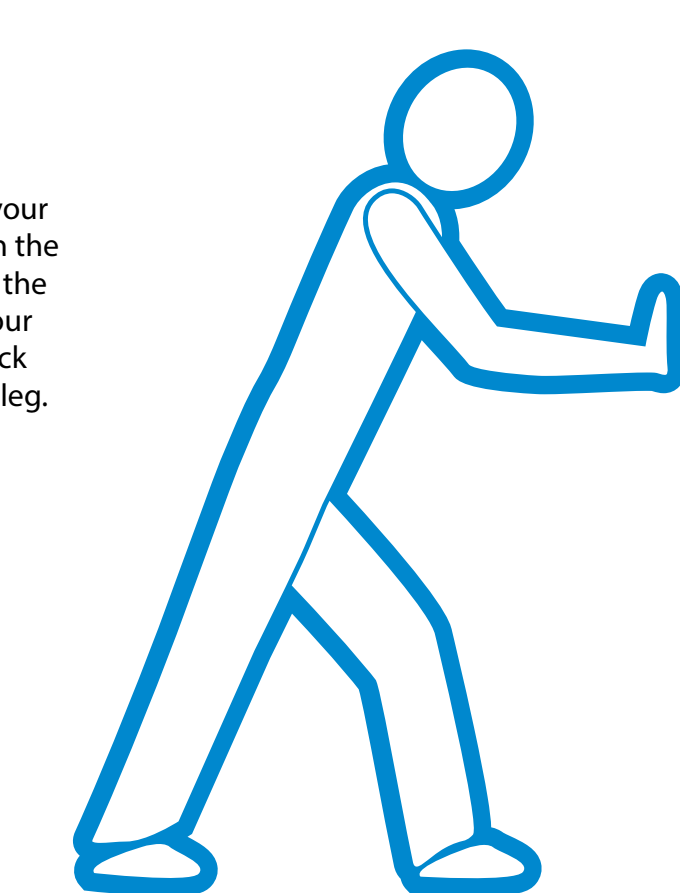
Repeat with the left leg.



Calf stretch

Stand with your feet apart, holding on to something sturdy, such as a wall.

Keep your body upright. Step one leg out behind you, keeping both feet pointing forwards. Bend your front knee, keeping your back knee straight and your heel firmly on the ground. You should feel a slight stretch in the calf of your back leg. If you don't, move your back foot further away. Bring your feet back together again and repeat with the other leg.



Quads or thigh stretch

If you have knee or balance problems, do the sitting option.

Level 1 Sitting option

Sit near the front of a sturdy chair that won't tip over. Move your bottom carefully to the left side of the chair so that only your right bum cheek is on the chair. Slide your left foot behind you so that your knee is pointing down to the floor.

Aim for a straight line from your shoulder to your knee. Repeat with the other leg.



Level 2-3 Standing option

Stand behind a chair and turn to the right, holding on to the back of the chair with your left hand. You could also use a wall for support.

Bend your right leg up behind you and, with your right hand, hold on to either your ankle or the back of your trouser leg.

Take your foot towards your bottom, with your knees together and your back upright.

Aim to make a straight line from your right shoulder to your right knee.

You should feel a slight stretch down the front of your thigh. Turn to face the other way and repeat with the other leg.



How hard should I work?

It depends what you're doing! Here's a guide:

For **aerobic** activity you want to feel **moderately to somewhat severely breathless**. You may feel slightly sweaty and your heart will beat faster too. This is normal.

During **strengthening exercises**, you should work your muscles hard for a short time until the muscles feel tired. You may also get a 'burning' sensation which is normal.

Use this scale to help you to see how hard you need to work – the words and numbers describe how short of breath you feel:

0	Nothing at all
0.5	Very, very slight (just noticeable)
1	Very slight
2	Slight
3	Moderate
4	Somewhat severe
5	Severe
6	
7	Very severe
8	
9	Very, very severe
10	Maximal

But getting breathless makes me anxious!

It's normal to get breathless when you're active. But if you're living with a lung condition, you may feel anxious when this happens. The key is to stay calm and learn ways to manage your breathlessness.

Remember, getting breathless when you exercise is good for you! By becoming more active, your body can use oxygen better. This will actually help you to feel less out of breath when you do everyday tasks.

Try the breathing techniques at [blf.org.uk/breathlessness](https://www.blf.org.uk/breathlessness)

The talk test

During aerobic activity, a quick way to check if you're working at the right level for you is to say out loud:

'This activity is doing me good!'

- If you can say the sentence with one or two stops for breath, you're working at a moderate intensity. This is your aim.
- If you can say it comfortably without stopping, increase the intensity.
- If you can't speak or can't say more than one word at a time, slow down and try to get your breath back a little on the go. Don't stop suddenly.

How can I stay safe when I exercise?

It's very important to look after yourself while you're active. Make sure you:

- start slowly and gradually build up
- warm up before and cool down after exercising
- carry your reliever inhaler and/or glyceryl trinitrate (GTN) spray if you have them. Use them when you need to
- wear loose, comfortable clothing and supportive non-slip shoes, like trainers
- drink plenty of water and wait for at least an hour after eating before you exercise
- use oxygen at your regular setting when exercising (if you normally use oxygen, even for just some of the time or overnight)
- are active at a level that's safe and right for you as advised by your health care professional.
- talk to your health care professional if exercise makes your chest feel tight or wheezy. You may find it beneficial to take a reliever inhaler 5-20 minutes before your exercise session, but you should discuss this with your health care professional first.

Should exercise hurt?

Exercise should not hurt. Pain **during** an exercise (beyond the usual aches and pains that are normal for you) means you should stop that activity and perhaps try a different one. Muscle soreness **after** exercise is a normal response if you haven't exercised for a while. It should settle in a day or two. Avoid exercises that make them sore until it settles.

STOP if you get any sudden unpleasant symptoms including:

- chest pain or tightness that is either new for you, or not relieved by your GTN if you use it
- feeling dizzy, nauseous, clammy or cold
- feeling increasingly wheezy
- general extreme fatigue
- weakness in an arm or leg that is more than just a tired muscle

Get advice from your GP or another health care professional if you experience any of the above or call 999 in an emergency.

Taken from the BLF exercise handbook. Version 5.

Last reviewed: March 2021 Due for review: March 2024

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