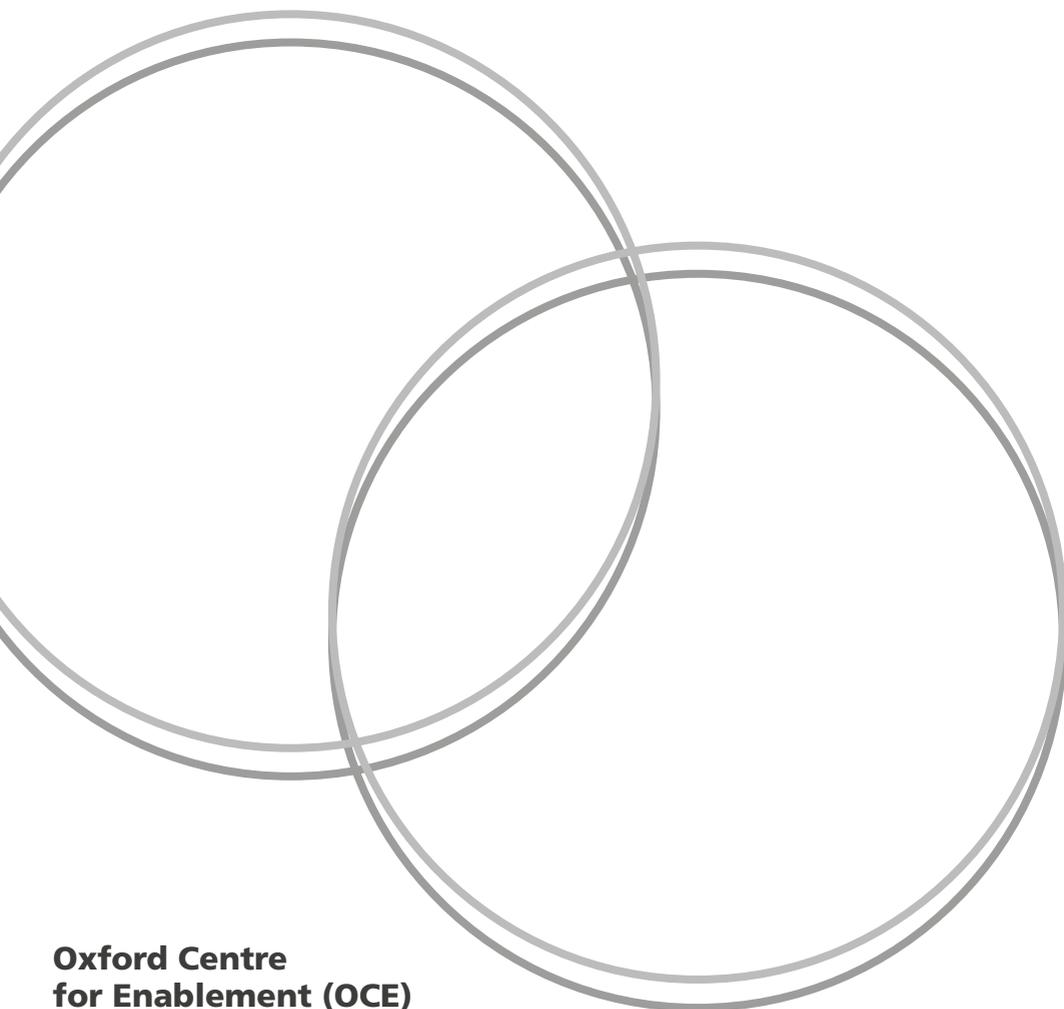




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Physical management of spasticity

Information for patients



Oxford Centre  
for Enablement (OCE)

## **Who is this leaflet for?**

This leaflet is for people who have spasticity and/or people who care for those with spasticity.

## **What is spasticity?**

Spasticity is increased muscle tightness or stiffness. Spasticity can happen after the brain or the nerves in your spine are damaged. Your muscles can tighten when you do not need them to and become stiff. Sometimes this stiffness in a muscle can help a person to do something. If it is normally difficult for a person to stand up, spasticity can make their legs feel stronger. But it can sometimes lead to problems such as pain or difficulties with daily tasks. If spasticity carries on for a long time, it can reduce the amount a muscle is able to move.

# What are physical management strategies to treat spasticity?

There are different ways or strategies you can use to manage your spasticity. Your physiotherapist or doctor will tell you about the most important strategies for you and how to fit these into your life. Physical management strategies are ones where you use your body in particular ways. It is very important to use these strategies.

## Stretches

Spasticity can make muscles and joints stiffer and tighter. Stretching can help you to:

- stay flexible
- become more flexible
- reduce pain
- feel more comfortable
- keep your skin healthy
- stay active
- keep a good posture (the way you stand and sit).

Your physiotherapist can recommend stretches that can be done on your own or with someone helping. Stretches work best when you do them every day. It is important to plan how you will fit them into your daily life. You might prefer a separate stretching session. Or you might prefer to do your stretches at the same time as daily tasks, like stretching your arms while you wash.

Stretches should always be slow and gentle. They work best if you hold them for 30 to 60 seconds. You may feel the stretch strongly in your muscles but you should not feel pain. Botulinum toxin injections can make stretches easier. Ask your doctor about these injections if you do not know about them already.

## **Positioning**

Spasticity is often part of a neurological condition. This means a condition caused by issues with the brain or nerves. You can become uncomfortable if you stay in one position for a while. You may find it hard to get comfortable in a chair, a wheelchair or when lying in bed and it can be difficult to adjust your position.

Spasticity can mean the body stays in some positions for a long time, which can cause pain, stiffness and skin damage. This also happens when people have spasms, where the body makes sudden movements without a person wanting it to. Being supported in good postures and changing positions regularly can help to reduce these problems. It might help you to have a clear plan of day and night-time positions.

If your physiotherapist or doctor suggests major changes to your positioning, you may need special equipment to support you. Your physiotherapist or doctor will give you the advice you need and can put you in touch with specialist teams to work with you.

## **Splinting**

Splints are supports you wear around your joints. They support the joints and stretch the muscles at the same time. They can help to prevent stiffness and to keep your muscles flexible when used regularly. This can reduce pain and skin problems. A physiotherapist or occupational therapist would work with you to provide the best splint for you. You will be given instructions and advice on how to put on and use the splint. Splints are most effective when worn daily for 6 to 8 hours. They can be worn during the day or overnight, depending on when you feel most tightness.

## General exercise

Regular exercise and physical activity of any sort is very helpful for people with spasticity. Exercise can help reduce the effect of spasticity because it can:

- build strength and improve fitness
- make daily activities easier
- improve mood and reduce tiredness
- keep your weight healthy
- reduce the risk of other health problems like stroke or heart disease.

Even a small amount of exercise or activity can improve your health. You should always start a new type of exercise slowly and increase the amount gradually. A good way to tell if your exercise level is right is to try to talk at the same time. If you are not able to do this, then you are working too hard.

All exercise is good. Finding something you enjoy will help keep you motivated. Exercising as part of a group is often more rewarding.

Your doctor or physiotherapist may give you a list of exercises that you should do. As well as those you may also want to:

- go for a walk
- cycle or use an exercise bike
- swim or do pool exercises
- dance and or do wheelchair dancing
- practice Yoga, Tai Chi or Pilates – you can adapt these to do while sitting down
- play bowls, boccia or other sports
- take exercise classes, or balance or seated aerobics classes.

## Where can I find out more?

Further information on exercise resources is available from these charities:

### **MS Society**

Search online for 'MS society staying active'.

Telephone: **0808 800 8000**

### **MS Trust**

Search online for 'MS trust exercise'.

Telephone: **0800 032 3839**

### **Stroke Association**

Search online for 'stroke association active leaflet'.

Telephone: **0300 3300 740**

### **Scope**

Search online for 'Scope disability sport'.

Telephone: **0808 800 3333**

# **There is information on local exercise facilities and groups:**

## **GO Active**

Search online for 'get Oxfordshire active'.  
Telephone: **01993 861 564**

## **Generation Games**

Search online for 'generation games oxfordshire.'  
Telephone: **01235 849 403**

## **ABLEize**

Search online for 'Ableize recreation sports'.

## **Contact**

Contact details for more information and advice during working hours:

## **Oxford Centre for Enablement, Spasticity Team**

Telephone: **01865 737 451**

## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



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