Exercise to reduce pain

It may seem unbelievable when you are in pain, but exercising regularly can actually help to reduce pain. Osteoporosis can sometimes cause severe back pain due to spinal fractures. Most therapists agree that in the early stages after suffering a broken bone rest with gentle movement is best, while the injury is healing.

But it is just as important to regain mobility and prevent deterioration of the muscles which hold the spine in place. Even if you suffer from severe curvature of the spine it is still possible that suitable exercise may bring relief and improvement. Seek advice from a physiotherapist.

Hydrotherapy, which is exercise in water, can be particularly good for pain relief because the water provides support as well as encouraging relaxation of tight muscles and joints. This, in turn, helps relieve pain and increase mobility. Ask your doctor if you think you would benefit.

Exercises that help with posture and build muscle strength may also help reduce pain and increase your sense of well being. Gentle exercises, such as lying on your front and gently raising the head and shoulders by pushing up with your arms, can help to build up the back muscles. For more exercises that may help reduce pain, ask your doctor to refer you to a physiotherapist.

It is easy to get into a vicious cycle of pain, tight muscles, stiffness and more pain. Relaxation exercises, particularly breathing techniques, may help to ease pain and break the cycle.

High impact exercises, such as jogging or jumping, are not appropriate for older exercisers, and especially not for people with osteoporosis because they can cause a broken bone. Avoid forward bending exercises, such as touching your toes, which increases the risk of spinal fractures.
Summary

- Physical activity becomes more important as you grow older
- Falls and broken bones are less common in those who remain physically active as they get older
- Exercise will help you stay independent for longer
- Good posture and balance are vital in avoiding falls as are strength, flexibility and stamina
- Exercise combined with relaxation may help to relieve pain

National Osteoporosis Society

If you want to know more about keeping physically active for longer, contact the National Osteoporosis Society. It has a range of interesting and informative booklets on all aspects of the disease. Call the NOS on 01761 471771, visit our website at www.nos.org.uk or write to us at National Osteoporosis Society, Camerton, Bath BA2 0PJ.

The NOS also has a helpline staffed by six nurses who can offer information on all aspects of osteoporosis. Call 0845 450 0230 between 10am and 5pm on Monday and 9.30am and 5pm Tuesday – Friday. The information provided is free and you only pay for the cost of a local-rate call.
Exercise, Osteoporosis and Preventing Broken Bones
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If you are over 70, have osteoporosis or are unable to do vigorous exercise this leaflet offers tips on how to lead a more active and independent life. Remaining physically active as you get older is one of the best ways to reduce your risk of falling, which can result in painful broken bones (fractures). By remaining fit and active your posture and sense of balance may improve, your muscles and stamina will stay stronger for longer and all these can combine to reduce pain.

Active lifestyles to avoid falls and fractures

Although you may not want to do all the things you did when you were younger, if you stop using your muscles as you get older they will lose strength. This, in turn, will affect your mobility and sense of balance.

Leading an active lifestyle can half your risk of breaking a bone, particularly your hip. The term ‘active lifestyle’ means enjoying a variety of physical activities throughout the day. These may include leisure activities like bowls or taking short, brisk walks as well as everyday activities like housework, shopping or climbing the stairs regularly.

You can adopt a more active lifestyle at any age, provided you begin with familiar activities that you enjoy and progress at an appropriate pace. And you will feel the benefits whatever your age – research has shown that you are never too old to start reaping the rewards of being more active!
On balance – exercise is best!

As we get older our risk of falling increases which puts us in greater danger of breaking a bone, particularly the hip. So we often need to improve our sense of balance.

If you like to swim, try walking about in the water, sideways and backwards as well as forwards. Tai Chi, an ancient form of Chinese exercise, trains balance through gentle and controlled movements and there are teachers who can adapt the many versions for frailer groups. Dance is another balance-improving activity.

Use it or lose it!

Increasing the strength of your muscles doesn’t mean aiming to be Mr Universe! Using your muscles regularly will make them stronger which can reduce your risk of falling and it’s good to strengthen your leg muscles to make you steadier on your feet.

Try these simple exercises, building up the number you do:

Sit on a kitchen chair, slide forward a little and hold onto the chair edge with straight arms. Slide one leg forward until it is straight. Tighten tummy and thigh muscles and slowly lift up the straightened leg a few inches to the count of five and slowly lower to the count of five – don’t let it just drop. Repeat with the other leg.

Stand tall behind the chair, lightly holding onto its back. Look forward and rise up on your toes, making sure your weight doesn’t roll forward. Hold for a few seconds and lower slowly. Try to do this with good balance using the chair as little as possible. Repeat.
Other general exercises

Cycling is excellent exercise for leg muscles, especially the thigh muscles. Avoid dropped handlebar bicycles because a bent back does not help posture and may make spinal curvature worse.

Golf, bowls and croquet are all sports that people can enjoy into old age. Golf provides a good walk and also develops flexibility for the shoulders and spine.

Gardening can also be a useful activity if it has always been of interest to you. Long-handled tools and raised flower beds will allow you to avoid bending.

Better to be safe than sorry!

Physical activity in moderate amounts is safe if you follow a few simple rules:

- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes
- Make sure you have enough space and there are no hazards like loose rugs or wires
- Warm-up with gentle movements before you begin
- Work a bit harder every day to improve performance, and aim for gradual improvement. Little and often is best and if you stop the beneficial effects gradually wear off

This is just some of the useful advice outlined in the NOS booklet Exercise and Osteoporosis (£3.50).

Research into Ageing also has a useful publication Exercise for Healthy Ageing (suggested donation £5). Call the charity on 020 7843 1550 for more information.