

# Getting Fit While You Sit



**O**ur bodies contain thousands of muscles. But when we think of exercise, most of us think "legs." When our legs are out of commission, we often put the whole exercise program on hold.

The fact is, good and extremely valuable exercise can be had without use of the legs. Arms, neck, shoulders, abdomen, and many other parts of the body can be strengthened and kept flexible by simple exercises. And you can get an excellent workout sitting down.

This is especially important for people with diabetes (both insulin dependent and non-insulin dependent) who can benefit a great deal from even light exercises.

Always remember, though, the safest approach to beginning a new exercise program is to check with your physician, start slowly and progress slowly.

## ***Exercises to Strengthen Muscles***

If you have been inactive for a long period of time, you may want to start doing simple muscle-strengthening exercises. For these, you just use your muscles—without any added resistance.

If you have been somewhat active but not exercising regularly, you can try using small dumbbells, hand or wrist weights, or exercise bands to make the process a little more challenging. Progress to heavier weights as you increase your strength and endurance.

Please remember: Never hold your breath while doing any of these exercises. This can increase chest pressure and decrease blood flow to your heart and brain, causing dizziness and possibly fainting. Always breathe normally and never strain or push too hard while exercising.

The exercises described here will help strengthen muscles, increase the endurance in those muscles, and

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maintain or improve the range of motion in joints. You should be able to do them with no discomfort and without becoming unusually tired.

If you feel uncomfortable or very tired, STOP! Check with your doctor or exercise specialist if problems continue. You may be working too hard or doing the exercises incorrectly.

These exercises should be repeated 10 to 15 times if strength and endurance allow.

If you can't do them that many times, you may be using too much resistance or you just might need to build your strength a bit more slowly.

Take your time, enjoy yourself, but do try to keep moving.



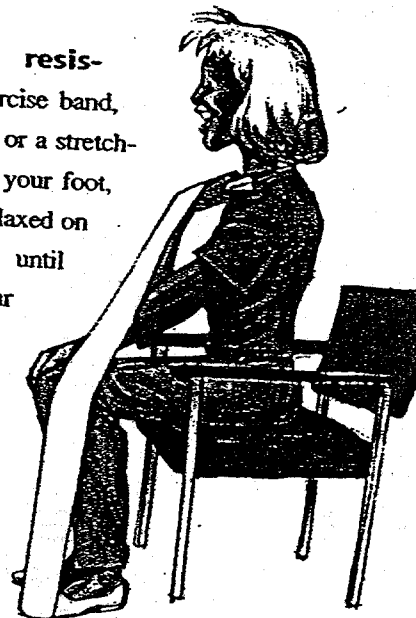
**Arm curls:** Start sitting up straight with your arms resting on the arms of your chair. Bend your arms at the elbows until they touch your shoulders. Return to the starting position and relax. You don't need to "make a muscle" or contract your biceps fully to do this exercise.

**Triceps extension:** Sit in a chair with your arms along the arm of the chair. Push down with your palms on the arms of the chair. This will strengthen the muscles used to help you get

up out of the chair. Be careful not to hold your breath or strain during this exercise.

**Abdominal press:** Begin sitting up straight in the chair with good posture (back straight, shoulders back, etc.). Try to pull your lower back toward the back of the chair by contracting your stomach muscles. Hold the position for 3 to 5 seconds, relax, and repeat.

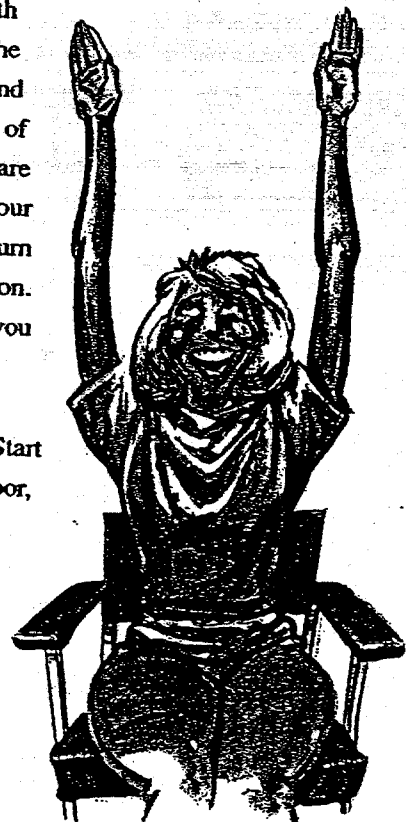
**Arm curls with resistance:** Using an exercise band, such as a Theraband®, or a stretching device secured by your foot, begin with your arm relaxed on one leg. Pull upward until your hand reaches your shoulder. Hold for three seconds. Then relax and return to the starting position. Repeat this exercise 10 to 15 times, then switch arms and repeat.



**Shoulder shrugs:** Start with your arms in your lap or in a relaxed position with your elbows bent on the arms of the chair. "Shrug" both shoulders as high as possible and return to normal position.

**Shoulder presses:** Start with your arms in your lap, in a relaxed position with your elbows bent on the arms of the chair. Extend your arms fully in front of you until elbows are straight. Then raise your arms above the head. Return to the original position. Repeat as many times as you can up to 15.

**Knee extension:** Start with both feet on the floor, knees bent at 90 degrees (normally). Slowly extend one leg until the knee is straight and the leg parallel to the floor. Return to original position. Repeat for the other leg.





**Ankle circles/**

**Toe flex:**

Start with one foot off the floor. Make circles with your ankle both clockwise and counter-clockwise. Repeat for the other foot.

Then point and curl your toes downward (toward the floor) and repeat for the other foot.

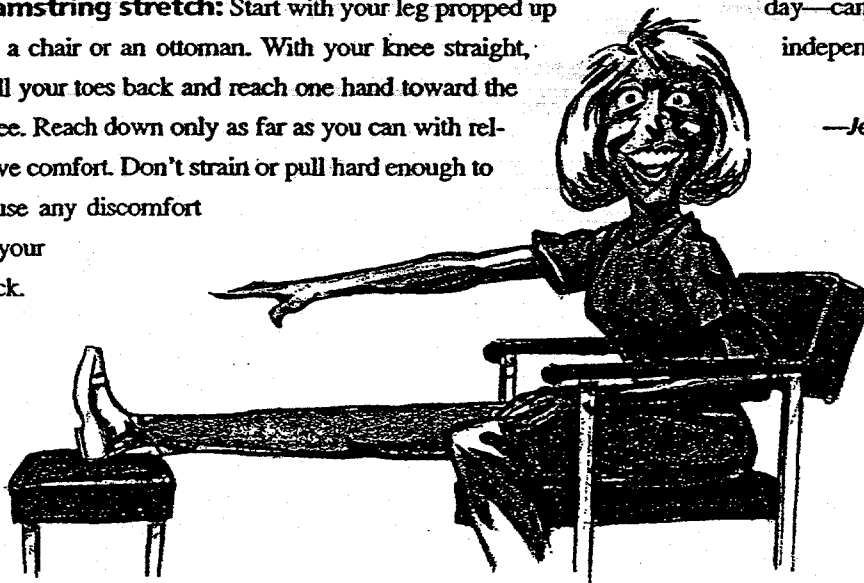
**Exercises for Flexibility**

Stretching (or flexibility) exercises should be done slowly, never with bouncing. They should not be painful, but you should be able to "feel" the stretch. These exercises usually are done in a sitting or lying position to offset the effects of gravity.

Two or three slow repetitions of each exercise are adequate. These exercises can be done once a day—or more than once a day if you feel comfortable and inspired!

**Chest stretch:** Begin sitting up straight in the chair with good posture. Arch your upper back and attempt to pinch your shoulder blades together. Relax and return to the starting position.

**Hamstring stretch:** Start with your leg propped up on a chair or an ottoman. With your knee straight, pull your toes back and reach one hand toward the knee. Reach down only as far as you can with relative comfort. Don't strain or pull hard enough to cause any discomfort in your back.



**Gluteals/Lower back:** Start in a normal sitting position, back straight with your leg propped up on a chair or ottoman that is about equal height to the one you're sitting on. Using both hands to assist, pull one knee up toward your chest as far as you can within the limits of your strength and comfort level. Return to original position. Switch legs. Repeat two or three times for each leg.

**Neck exercises:** Start in a normal seated position, sitting up straight. Bend your head forward, then return to normal position. Next, bend your head to the right side, then return to normal position. Bend your head to the left side, and then back to the normal position. Finally, turn your head to look over your right shoulder, then look over your left shoulder.

**Staying in Condition**

Anyone who is inactive or restricted from exercise can quickly become de-conditioned (which means out of shape). In most cases, that doesn't need to happen. You can still maintain the strength and flexibility of many muscles—even when you can't move around very much.

So if you're not able to use your legs fully—whether because of painful neuropathy, foot surgery, or a skiing accident—don't neglect the rest of your body.

The exercises and movements described here—light, simple, fun, and easy, done once or twice a day—can help you stay fit and keep you independent.

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