



Step up! Exercise for intermittent claudication

Introduction

If you have been diagnosed with intermittent claudication – leg pain that comes on after you start walking and then goes away with rest – part of your treatment may include recommended exercise.

This leaflet describes an exercise programme that combines home-based exercise and walking exercise, with the overall aim of helping you to increase the distance you are able to walk comfortably and improving your general fitness. For further information on intermittent claudication, including possible causes and diagnosis, see associated Premier Vascular leaflet:

- Treating and managing intermittent claudication.

About the exercise programme

Appropriate and regular exercise can be very beneficial by helping to increase the blood flow to your leg muscles when you walk and to increase the time and distance you are able to walk before pain starts. This exercise programme focuses on:

- A group of exercises you can do at home.
- Guidance on appropriate walking exercise.

Ideally your programme should include home-based exercise and walking on alternate days. Home-based exercises are described first, followed by walking guidance, and finally the benefits of going for a 12-week exercise programme.

Exercise at home

These can be done every day or at least three times a week. Each exercise is timed at 2–3 minutes. Four types are explained:

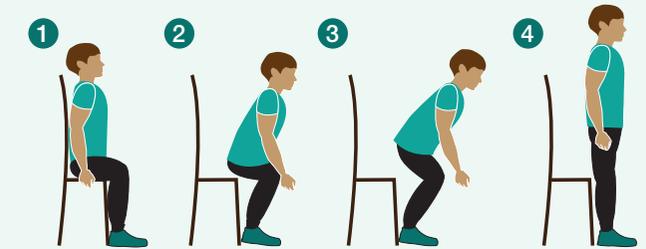
- Sit to stand
- Walking on the spot
- Step ups
- Wall press ups

Before you exercise

- Choose a safe place with plenty of room and no clutter or hazards in your way.
- Wear comfortable clothing and flat, non-slip trainers or shoes.
- You will need a stable chair, a strong, secure step box, an uncluttered wall area, and a watch or clock for timing yourself.

Sit to stand

This simple, effective exercise helps to maintain leg and hip strength.

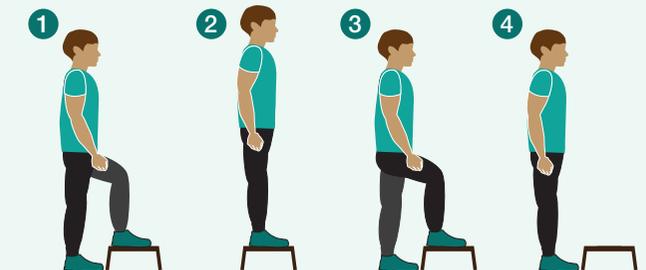


1. Sit in your chosen chair with your feet flat on the floor.
2. Slide forward as far as possible.
3. Move your feet back so they are lined up with the front edge of the chair.
4. Stand up by using your backside and legs; try not to use your hands on the chair.

Repeat for 2–3 minutes, then rest for a couple of minutes before the next exercise.

Step ups

This is a good exercise for all-round leg strength.



1. Step up smoothly onto the step box with one foot, keeping the other foot firmly on the floor until you have transferred your body weight onto your raised foot.
2. Straighten your raised leg and take up the other foot onto the box so that you finish with both legs straight.
3. Lower one foot back down to the ground, and then lower the other foot down.
4. Finish with both feet on the ground.

Repeat the exercise, starting with the other leg. Continue for 2–3 minutes, alternating the leading leg each time. Make sure you put your entire foot onto the step each time.

Rest for a couple of minutes before starting the next exercise.

Walking on the spot

This is a good, cardiovascular, whole-body exercise, activating all parts of your body including your calves.

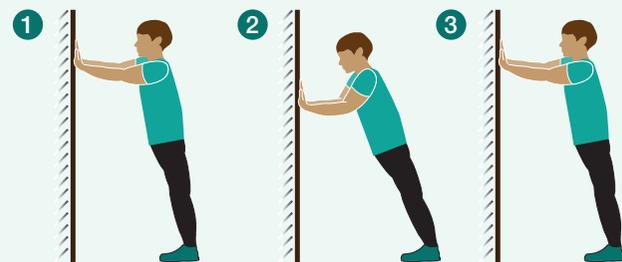


1. Check that your posture is upright and stand tall with your arms down by your sides.
- 2 & 3. Walk on the spot, swinging your arms at the same time.

Continue for 2–3 minutes, then rest for a couple of minutes before the next exercise.

Wall press ups

This exercise helps to strengthen the chest and leg muscles.



1. Start by standing upright, facing an uncluttered wall. Lean against it with your hands out.
2. Bend your elbows. Keep your feet together and heels on the floor; you should feel your calf muscles stretching.
3. With your hands at shoulder length apart, press your body back to starting position. Try to keep your back straight throughout the exercise.

Continue for 2–3 minutes, then rest for a couple of minutes.

Repeating the exercises

Take time to do each of these exercises, then try to do all four again. Aim for the amount of exercise that makes you feel hot and sweaty and a little out of breath.

Walking exercise

Before you walk

- Choose a park or somewhere interesting to walk in a circuit so you are not far from home or transport to take you home.
- Wear comfortable clothing and trainers or walking shoes.

Graduate your walking

At first, start walking until you feel mild leg pain. Continue walking until the pain becomes moderate or severe. On a scale of 1 to 5, the pain feels like 3 or more. Stop and rest until the pain goes away. This is usually after a few minutes. Repeat the cycle of exercise and resting for a total of 30–35 minutes.

As your programme continues, gradually increase the time you walk to a total of 50 minutes to one hour. As you progress, you will usually be able to walk for longer periods without pain.

Building up the benefits

Aim to work on the exercise programme every day and try to do home-based exercise and walking on alternate days. A combination that includes home-based exercise at least 3 days a week can be very beneficial.

The benefits of these exercises will take a while to show: we would like you to undertake a programme of exercise that lasts 12 weeks before you are reviewed in clinic again. The overall aim is to help you to achieve:

- An increase in the blood flow to your legs when you walk.
- A reduction in pain in your legs when you walk.
- An increase in your walking distance.
- Improvement in your cardiovascular fitness.
- Improved control of high blood pressure.
- A reduction in the risk of needing an operation.

And, in turn, this will help you to achieve and maintain improvement in your overall health.

For more information

The following Premier Vascular leaflet provides information and advice on associated treatments available.

- **Treating and managing intermittent claudication**

For additional information and guidance see NICE: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence www.nice.org.uk/guidance

www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg147/ftp/chapter/Lower-limb-peripheral-arterial-disease

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