

Short bouts of moderate exercise key to managing MS symptoms

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(Medical Xpress)—Research from the University of East Anglia and funded by the MS Society has found that short periods of moderate exercise, like walking or cycling, can improve multiple sclerosis (MS) symptoms.

Findings published today in *Multiple Sclerosis Journal* show how a pragmatic [exercise](#) programme improved fatigue levels and enhanced the quality of life in people with MS for up to nine months.

There are more than 100,000 people living with MS in the UK, and according to the MS Society, all of them are likely to experience the debilitating effects of MS fatigue (an overwhelming sense of tiredness) at some point during their condition.

The EXIMS (pragmatic EXercise Intervention for people with MS) study, was carried out at Sheffield Hallam University and led by Prof John Saxton from UEA's school of Rehabilitation Sciences.

He said: "It seems illogical to turn to exercise as a way of managing fatigue, but the results showed that a pragmatic programme based on short bouts of moderate intensity exercise can really help people improve symptoms and quality of life. Exercise can also offer social interaction – walking with friends, bike riding with the family – there's a lot to gain."

In one of the largest and most robust exercise studies for people with MS to date, 120 participants from the Sheffield area were recruited for the trial. 60 of them participated in 12 weeks of supervised gym-based and self-directed exercises in the home. The exercise programme also included cognitive behavioural techniques such as goal setting and help with understanding the benefits of exercise. The 60 remaining patients received usual care from the NHS, without any specific support for exercise.

Those receiving supervised sessions were asked to complete short bouts (5 X 3 minutes, with 2 minute rest intervals) of moderate intensity [aerobic exercise](#). As the study progressed, participants were encouraged to participate in longer periods of exercise (i.e. 5 X 4 minutes), or to take shorter rests, but with intensity remaining at moderate levels. Many participants also engaged in muscle strengthening and balance exercises.

The results showed that fatigue levels among participants who received

the programme were significantly lower. Researchers also noted long term improvements in emotional wellbeing, social function and overall quality of life for those in the [exercise group](#).

The study also showed that the tailored and semi-supervised exercise programme proved to be cost effective when compared to the 'usual care' offered on the NHS.

Ed Holloway, Head of Care and Services Research at the MS Society, who funded the study, said: "We're delighted that this study has shown how a well-designed exercise programme can be a cost-effective way to help manage some of the symptoms of MS. Fatigue in MS is an incredibly common but troubling symptom that can hugely affect an individual's quality of life. For many people with MS this programme could be a cost effective treatment option."

The research team are now working with other professionals to develop a programme, using the principles of this research, that can be rolled out to people with MS across the UK.

More information: A Carter, A Daley, L Humphreys, N Snowdon, N Woodroffe, J Petty, A Roalfe, J Tosh, B Sharrack, and JM Saxton, "Pragmatic intervention for increasing self-directed exercise behaviour and improving important health outcomes in people with multiple sclerosis: a randomised controlled trial." *Mult Scler* 1352458513519354, first published on January 13, 2014 [DOI: 10.1177/1352458513519354](https://doi.org/10.1177/1352458513519354)

Provided by University of East Anglia

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