



Headway Preston
Gentle Exercise Session 3
by Catherine Mitchell



the brain injury association
preston and chorley

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Welcome to my gentle exercise session 3

You can find the video to guide you through this sessions at:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHHwkEbAUPm5Gce5aZqT7Xw/>

The number of repetitions is just suggested. Please only do as many repetitions as feels comfortable for you. Always stop and rest if you feel any discomfort and take into account any medical advice you have received with regard to exercising. Basically - tune into your body, relax and enjoy!

Sit comfortably in a chair so that your feet are relaxed into the floor, hip-width apart with your ankles under your knees. Ideally your knees should be just slightly lower than your hips. Feel that you are sharing your weight equally on your right and left sitting bones and that your pelvis is level so that your spine can lengthen up out of your pelvis. Keep lengthening up through the top of your spine, which is about level with your ears. This ensures that the back of your neck is nice and long and your head can balance on the top of your spine taking the strain off your neck muscles. This posture also helps you to breathe more efficiently and feel more energised.

This session is made up of a combination of the movements from sessions 1 and 2, set to music to give you more of a challenge and the opportunity to enjoy the movements now that you may have gained some familiarity with them. (It doesn't matter if you haven't done them before.) The music is from an album for Pilates instructors called 'Energise' by Sam Reid.

1. Celebration

Pressing down through the balls of the feet and bases of the little toes, lift your heels. Roll through your feet to lift your toes. This mobilises your feet and ankles. It can also help you to feel grounded and more relaxed. Pay attention to the changing sensations on the soles of your feet as you peel them as if the floor is sticky. **Do this 4 times.**

Shoulder rolls bringing your shoulders forwards, up towards your ears, back and then relax them down. **Do this 4 times.**

Pressing down through the balls of the feet and bases of the little toes, lift your heels and slide your hands down your thighs towards your knees. Roll through your feet to lift your toes and slide your hands up your thighs towards your hips. **Do this 4 times.**

Shoulder rolls bringing your shoulders forwards, up towards your ears, back and then relax them down. **Do this 4 times.**

Pressing down through the balls of the feet and bases of the little toes, lift your heels and slide your hands down your thighs towards your knees with a hinge forwards from your hips. Roll through your feet to lift your toes and slide your hands up your thighs towards your hips with a hinge back from your hips. **Do this 4 times.**

Shoulder rolls bringing your shoulders forwards, up towards your ears, back and then relax them down. **Do this 4 times.**

2. Reflection

Starting with the hands on the knees, slide one hand up your thigh towards your hip causing your ribcage to rotate a little to that side. Then slide that hand back down towards your knee as the other hand slides up your thigh towards your hip, causing your ribcage to rotate the other way. Massaging your thighs in this way can be quite calming and comforting. This exercise also mobilises your thoracic spine - the part of your spine where the ribcage is. Only rotate as far as is comfortable for you. Take care not to force the twist if you have osteoporosis - just be gentle with the movement. If it feels ok then think of turning your ribcage, then your shoulders, then your head to rotate further. You could breathe in as you rotate and out as you come through the centre, or just breathe subconsciously if that feels strange or strained.

Do this 8 times each way slowly and then 8 times each way more quickly.

Imagine that you have a thread coming from the crown of your head lifting you upwards as your sitting bones stay firmly in contact with the chair. Imagine that the thread is being pulled up and circled round so that you go forward, to the side, back and to the other side in a smooth circular motion. The movement is coming from your hips and you are trying to keep your spine long to switch on the core muscles round your middle. **Go 4 times round one way then 4 times round the other way. Repeat a couple of times the first way and a couple of times the second way. Stop if you feel dizzy.**

Circle your hands round from your wrists **4 times each way**. Repeat the circles outwards taking your arms upwards, then let them drift downwards with the circles inwards. Repeat the circles outwards opening your arms out to the sides, then let them come back in with the circles inwards.

Tense your bottom muscles as the same time as clenching your hands, then relax your bottom muscles and hands completely. You could breathe in as you tense and breathe out as you relax. **Do this 4 times slowly then 8 times quickly.**

Stretch alternate legs forward onto the heel, straightening the knee and drawing the toes up towards the shin to feel the stretch on your calf muscle. **Do this 8 times.**

Sit far forwards enough in the chair that you feel safe and secure but that you can hinge forwards from your hips as if you were preparing to stand up. Keep your spine long and make the bend at your hips, not at your waist. With your hands on your thighs, press down through your feet to feel your thigh muscles switch on. Notice that you don't take tension in your neck or shoulders as you do this. **Do this 8 times**. Either continue with this or actually push up to stand on your next one. Stand all the way up then hinge at your hips to take your bottom back and down to the chair. You could either use your arms to assist or cross your arms over your chest and just use the strength of your leg and bottom muscles if you can. **Do this 4 times**. On the last one you could either sit back down or stay standing and go round to the back of your chair.

3. Inspiration

With your feet hip-width apart, pedal from heel to heel pushing one heel down as the other one lifts. Imagine the resistance of a stiff pedal as you push down. If you are standing, try to keep your pelvis level as you do this to switch on the muscles that stabilise the pelvis. Hold onto the chair if you need to, or let go to challenge your balance if you feel safe to do so.

Do this 8 times. Then keep going with the rhythm 'quick, quick, slow' 8 times.

Push forwards with the palms to straighten your elbows, then pull your fists back by your waist leading back with your elbows to give you a stretch across your chest. **Do this 8 times.** If you are standing you could bend your knees as you push forward and straighten them as you pull back. Keep your spine upright and your heels down. **Push across your body 8 times.** If you are standing you could take your feet wider apart, bend your knees and then straighten them transferring your weight more over to one side as the arm pushes across. **Repeat 8 times** pushing upwards if this is comfortable for you.

Take a big stretch as if you are yawning to finish.

4. Definition

If you are standing, take your feet a little wider apart than your shoulders. Bend one knee a little to shift your weight to that side. Shift from side to side in this way, bending one knee as the other straightens. At the same time do alternate shoulder rolls, just relaxing into the movement and rolling the shoulder backwards as you shift your weight over to that side. If you are seated, you could do the shoulder roll with a little sway that way. **Do with the rhythm 'slow, slow, slow, slow, slow, slow, quick, quick, slow'. Repeat this three times.**

If you are standing, keep your feet hip-width apart but place your right foot forward so that you can rock forward and back a little, rolling through your feet to lift your back heel as you rock forward and your front toes as you rock back. This may test your balance. You could either hold onto the chair or co-ordinate a breaststroke arm movement with the rock forward and back, starting the stroke as you rock forward and completing it as you rock back. If you are seated, you could lift the heels as you reach forward to start the stroke and complete it with the push back as you lift your toes. You could also take a hinge forward and back from your hips to add an extra challenge for your core muscles. Whether standing or seated, you could imagine the resistance of the water to put more energy into the movement. **Do 4 slow breaststrokes/rocks forward and back with that foot forward. Repeat this with your left foot forward.**

Roll your left shoulder inwards twice, then your right. Repeat this three times on each side. If you like, as you roll your left shoulder you could take a little walk to the right, and as you roll your right shoulder you could take a little walk to the left.

Swing your arms and clap side to side 16 times.

Repeat the shoulder rolls inwards more quickly, **4 times each way.** Add the little walk side to side if you like.

Do 4 breaststrokes with the right foot forward, then shoulder rolls transferring your weight or swaying from side to side with the rhythm as before. Repeat this starting with the left foot forward. Roll your left shoulder inwards twice, then your right with the little walk to the right then to the left. **Repeat this twice as quick each way. 4 claps.** Repeat the breaststrokes and the shoulder rolls one more time.

Finish with **4 big slow hip circles each way if standing, or circling round from the hips keeping the spine long as before if seated.**

5. Relaxation

Holding onto the back of the chair, take one foot back and ease that heel down to the floor for a calf stretch. The front knee is bent and the back knee is straight. If you are seated, stretch one leg forward onto the heel and draw the toes up towards the shin as before. **Hold the stretch for 10 secs then repeat on the other side.**

Relaxation continued:

Hold onto the chair. Place the heel of one foot directly in front of the toes of the other as if you are standing on a tightrope. Share your weight equally on both feet. Whichever foot is in front, take that hand onto your shoulder so you can make elbow circles with that arm.

Keep holding onto the chair with the other hand. Take the elbow forward, up, back and down within a pain-free range of movement. If you feel quite steady, you could add a rotation from your waist as the elbow circles round. For even more of a challenge, you could look round towards your elbow as it circles back. If you are very steady, you could try holding onto the chair more lightly or even letting go and placing that hand on your hip. **Do approx. 10 elbow circles.** If you are seated, do the elbow circles with or without the rotation from your waist and the turn of your head. **Repeat on the other side.**

If you are standing, now sit down to stretch the hamstrings. Sit towards the front of your chair so that you can completely straighten out one leg. Hold onto the chair firmly with both hands. Lift up through your spine and tip forwards from your hips to create a stretch down the back of your leg. For more of a stretch pull the toes up towards the shin. Relax the foot if that stretch is too intense. You should feel a stretch which may be mildly uncomfortable, but come out of it if you feel any pain. If you have ever had sciatica take care to really hinge from your hips which will stretch the hamstrings, rather than bending at the waist which could stress the sciatic nerve. **Hold for 10 seconds then repeat on the other side.**

Take a few deep breaths to finish and centre yourself.

If you have felt a little calmer through doing these exercises, try to remember that calmness is your natural state when you let go of tension. Tuning into the body and the breath helps us to connect with the here and now, which helps us to let go of physical tension and reduce the busyness of the mind. We can try and do that throughout the day/night when we notice our bodies and minds becoming tense.