



Headway Preston
Gentle Exercise Session 4
by Catherine Mitchell



the brain injury association
preston and chorley

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Welcome to my gentle exercise session 4

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.

You could use a scarf for this session, but if you haven't got one you could also do the exercises without one.

The music I have used is from the Calm app and is called 'Mindfulness' from the 'Soothing Piano' selection.

1. 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 onto your heels to lift your toes and slide your hands up your thighs towards your hips. **Do this about 10 times.**

2. Roll towards the outer edges of your feet sliding your hands down the insides of your thighs. Roll towards the inner edges of your feet sliding your hands up the outsides of your thighs. **Do this about 10 times.**

3. Imagine your feet are resting on a big ink pad. Lift one heel so you can roll the ball of your foot round on the ink pad as if you are coating it with ink. **Roll round about 10 times one way then 10 times the other way to mobilise your ankle joint.** Only take your ankle joint through a pain-free range of movement. Repeat this with the other foot.

The above 3 exercises are mainly to mobilise your ankles.

4. Lifting your toes and heels alternately, wiggle your feet out as far as you feel comfortable, perhaps feeling a slight stretch on your inner thigh (adductor) muscles. At the same time, you could stretch your arms up and out to make a star shape, really stretching up through your spine. Then wiggle your feet back in bringing your arms back in simultaneously. **Do this about 10 times.** This movement is good for mobilising your ankles and hips.

5. Now take the scarf and place it against the back of your waist. You may notice how this helps you to sit up tall. Hold onto the scarf with a 90 degree bend at your elbows and your upper arms tucked in against the sides of your body. With palms facing upwards and upper arms staying tucked in, open the lower arms and hands out to the sides as far as you can without straining. If you have ever had a rotator cuff injury, this won't be very far but just do what you can without pain. It is a good exercise for the shoulders that physiotherapists often prescribe. You could breathe in as you open, and breathe out as you bring the hands back in front. You may notice how your spine naturally stretches up a bit more as you breathe in. **Do this about 10 times.**

6. Put the scarf down behind you and place your hands by your hips, so that as you stretch one leg out in front you can push down through your hands to lift up through your spine. As you stretch out onto the heel, see if you can extend your knee and draw the toes up towards your shin to work the muscles on the front of the thigh and put a stretch on the calf muscle. **Changing from side to side, do this about 5 times on each side.** This is a good exercise for the range of movement at your ankles (dorsi flexion) and knees (extension) and to activate the knee extensor muscles (quadriceps).

7. Take hold of the scarf behind you so you can stretch it back, extending your elbows and gently squeezing your shoulder blades together to create a stretch across your chest. You could lift your heels at the same time and take a breath in. Breathe out to release the position. **Do this about 10 times.** This movement is good for posture and breathing. It is a good one to do if you have been sitting at the computer/doing artwork or crafting/driving for a long time.

8. Bring the scarf round in front of you, perhaps folding it in half if it is long, and hold it out in front at about waist-height with your hands a little wider apart than your shoulders. Swivelling on your heels, turn your toes from side to side. Start to turn from your waist so that the scarf goes the opposite way from your toes, a bit like the upper and lower parts of a pepper mill rotating opposite ways. **Do this about 10 times with an easy swing, then you could do 4 or 5 slower ones** with more of a stretch but not forcing. This is a good movement for mobilising your spine. It may also give you a slight stretch on your outer hips/thighs.

9. The next movement is good for getting some segmental movement/fluidity through your spine. Start by lengthening up through your spine and hinging forward from your hips with a stretch forward through your breastbone. Then allow your spine to gently flex so you are slightly curved over from the waist. From there rebuild your spine, one vertebra on top of the next, to come back upright. **Do this about 5 times.**

Reverse the movement so that you start by curving over slightly, then ripple your breastbone through to stretch forwards and come back upright. **Do about 5 that way.** You could then repeat the first way taking the scarf up, forwards, down and back in towards your body to reflect the movement of your spine. Then reverse the movement again taking the scarf down, forwards, up and back in towards your body as you lower it down. Work within a pain-free range of movement for you.

10. Rest the scarf down on your legs to point one foot onto the toes (plantar flexion), increasing the angle of flexion/bend at your knee. Lower that foot down flat again and repeat on the other side. Change from side to side. See if you can gradually increase the bend at the knee to take the foot further back. This movement is to mobilise the knees, but if you have had a knee replacement just bend the knee as much as you can without forcing it. **Do about 5 on each side.** Keep lengthening up through your spine, so your core muscles will naturally be switching on.

11. a) Take hold of the scarf and reach it up just as high as your shoulders will let you without forcing. Take it up and then take a little stretch over to one side to open up the opposite side of your ribcage. Bring the scarf back to centre then lower it down. Repeat this stretching over the other way. This is another good movement for your thoracic spine which is the part of the spine (12 vertebrae) attached to your ribcage (12 pairs of ribs). **Do this about 4 times.**

11. b) Sitting a little further forward in your chair, but only as far as you feel safe and comfortable, take alternate feet back under the chair if you can. Take care if you have had a knee replacement and don't do this movement if it doesn't feel good for you. This movement is to give you a stretch on the front of your thigh (quadriceps) and possibly hip (hip flexor). **Do this about 4 times each side.**

11. c) You could now put 11. a) and 11. b) together to challenge co-ordination and perhaps increase the stretch. Whichever leg you bend, take the stretch up and over to the opposite side, away from the bending leg. **Change from side to side and do 4 or 5 on each side.**

12. Just to release your spinal extensors, take a little curve forwards to relax the muscles then rebuild your spine. **Do this 2 or 3 times.**

13. To challenge co-ordination, you could now put **exercises 5. and 6. together**: Stretch one leg out onto the heel as you open your lower arms and hands out. Bend that leg and place the foot back down as you bring your arms back in. Change from side to side with the legs. Use the scarf against your back to help you lift up through your spine. **Do about 5 on each side.**

14. Wrap the scarf around the base of your ribcage, holding it at the front so your arms and shoulders can relax. You could close your eyes and breathe normally. With the scarf against your ribcage, just notice how it naturally expands and contracts with your breath. Don't force this movement - just tune into it with your awareness. After a few breaths, you could let your hands rest on your thighs and just scan your body from the soles of your feet to the crown of your head, letting go of any tension. You could use your exhalations to let go of tension - feel you are breathing it out. When you are ready you could open your eyes and finish with 3 deep breaths. Take your time to stand up, especially if you have relaxed quite deeply.

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.

