



Headway Preston
Gentle Exercise Session 5
by Catherine Mitchell



the brain injury association
preston and chorley

10th anniversary 2020

Welcome to my gentle exercise session 5

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 some of the exercises in this session, but if you haven't got one it doesn't matter.

The music I have used is by Sam Reid and is a mixture of his albums for Pilates teachers, 'Energise' and 'Rejuvenate'.

You will be familiar with the exercises if you have done the previous sessions, but it doesn't matter if you have not done them.

1. Breathe

a.) Sit with your back supported by the chair for this exercise. Place the scarf under your right foot and hold it in both hands. Keeping your thigh in contact with the chair, fully straighten your knee to work your quadriceps, then let it bend again. **Do this 4-5 times.** With your knee bent, lift your thigh just off the chair to work your hip flexors. Keep your back as straight as you can. Lower your thigh back down to the chair and straighten your knee again, then let it bend. Lift, lower, **straighten and bend 4-5 times.** With your knee relaxed, circle your foot round from the **ankle 8-10 times one way then repeat the other way.** Swap the scarf to the left foot and repeat all of this.

b.) Now sit with your feet firmly on the floor, so you may need to shuffle forwards towards the front of the chair a little. 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 forcing. If you have ever had a rotator cuff injury, this might not 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 8-10 times.

If it is comfortable for you and you would like to challenge your co-ordination, at the same time as you open the lower arms, you could bend one knee to point onto the toes. Place the foot flat down again as the lower arms come back in. See if you can gradually increase the bend at the knee to take the foot further back. This movement is to forcing it.

mobilise the knees, but if you have had a knee replacement just bend the knee as much as you can without

c.) 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 8-10 times with an easy swing.** This is a good movement for mobilising your spine. It may also give you a slight stretch on your outer hips/thighs.

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 there rebuild your spine, one vertebra on top of the next, to come back upright. As you do this, take the scarf up, forwards, down and back in towards your body to reflect the movement of your spine. **Do this 4-5 times, then 4-5 times the other way:** Reverse the spinal movement so that you start by curving over slightly, then ripple your breastbone through to stretch forwards and come back upright. Also reverse the arm movement so you take 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.

e.) Sit far forwards enough in the chair that you feel safe and secure but that you can hinge forwards from your hips. Push down through your feet to feel your thigh muscles switch on as if you were preparing to stand up. Notice that you don't take tension in your neck or shoulders as you do this. Always keep your knees hip width apart and not going beyond your toes. You could do a couple like this and then a couple to actually come up to stand. You could use your arms to assist you if necessary. Then you could either remain standing or sit down for the next few exercises.

2. Precision

This section is to lift the heart-rate slightly. Make sure you have space to move safely.

a.) If you are standing you could hold onto the back of the chair, but make sure you are standing with your spine as upright as possible. With the feet hip width apart, push one heel down as the other one lifts, as if you are pushing down pedals with alternate heels. If you are not holding onto the chair, you could let your arms swing naturally. **Do about 16 slow ones, then you could do with the rhythm 'quick, quick, slow' 8 times, and finally 32 quick ones.**

b.) Take 2 slow steps away from the chair then 2 slow steps back towards it. You could push forwards with your arms as you step back, then pull back leading with the elbows as you step forwards. **Do this 4 times. Repeat quickly 8 times. At the same time you could make 8 'train-like' motions with your arms.** If you are seated you could just do the arm movements. If you are standing, keep your hands on the chair if you need to.

c.) With the feet slightly wider apart than your shoulders, bend your knees reaching your sitting bones back and down into a squat (just bend as deeply as is comfortable) so you can gently slap your hands down onto your thighs. Reach up and over to one side to clap and take your weight over to that side. **Do this 8 times changing from side to side.**

d.) Step and kick your bottom (hamstrings curls) **16 times**. At the same time, swing your arms from side to side with biceps curls (bending the elbows to bring your hands towards your shoulders).

e.) Do **2 big slow rolls** with your left shoulder. At the same time you could take a little walk to the right. Repeat this with the right shoulder and a little walk to the left. Then step more quickly from **side to side 8 times**, rolling the shoulders backwards at the same time. **Repeat all of this twice.**

f.) Repeat section b.)

g.) Repeat c.) 4 times, then d.) 8 times. Then do a 'step together step' to the right circling the arms round and kick your bottom with a biceps curl. Do this 8 times changing from side to side.

h.) Repeat e.) twice. Then slow down the steps from side to side. As the music slows right down, finish off with some gentle swaying from side to side, perhaps circling alternate arms outwards and then inwards.

3. Release

a.) With the feet a little wider apart than the shoulders, circle your hips round 6-8 times each way. Keep your knees soft and imagine that you are skimming the inside of a hula hoop with your hips. If you are seated, you could circle round from your hips to trace circles with the crown of your head.

b.) Bring your feet hip-width apart and soften your knees. Bend to the side as far as you feel comfortable. If you are seated, you could slide your hands down the front legs of your chair. If you are standing, you could slide your hands down the seams of your trousers, or hold onto the chair if you need to. Whether seated or standing, try and go directly to the side as if you are in between two panes of glass. You could use your breath, breathing out as you bend to the side and in as you rebuild your spine. You could visualise your spine, starting the movement from the top of your spine and working down it into the flexion and then re-stacking one bone back on top of the other to extend it. **Do 6-8 bends each way.**

c.) If you are standing, keep your feet hip-width apart but place one 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. **Do 3-4 breaststrokes/rocks forward and back then come into a calf stretch and hold that for 10-15 secs.** If you are standing, have your front knee bent and your back knee straight, easing the back heel down towards the floor to feel the stretch. You could hold onto the chair to begin with and then see if you could let go with one arm and then the other, reaching out to the sides. If you feel steady you could reach your arms up. Continue to hold onto the chair with one or both hands if necessary. If you are seated you could stretch one leg out in front and draw your toes up towards your shin to feel the stretch on your calf.

d.) If you are standing, take a seat again with your feet hip-width apart on the floor and lengthen up through your spine. Open your arms out as far as you can into a chest stretch with your elbows bent at right-angles and fingertips pointing upwards. Roll your right arm in from your shoulder to take that hand to the base of your spine if you can. If not, just take the hand onto your hip. Take the left hand to the top of your spine if you can, or alternatively to touch your left shoulder. If possible, creep the hands closer together to increase the stretch on your shoulders without forcing. **Hold this position for 10-15 secs.** Relax your shoulders with a few shoulder rolls then repeat this on the other side.

e.) 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 with a breath in. Breathe out to release the position. **Do this 6-8 times.** This movement is good for posture and breathing.

f.) 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. Use your exhalations to let go of any tension, with a little sigh if this helps. After a few breaths, you could put the scarf down to place one hand in the centre of your upper chest and the other hand just below the ribcage on your abdomen. Just notice how, with each inhalation, your tummy gently pushes out into your hand and, with each exhalation, it gently falls back. Relax your abdominal muscles as much as you can to allow this natural breath pattern and movement. Also notice that the upper chest hardly moves and your shoulders stay relaxed. If you notice that your shoulders are rising and your upper chest is moving, this could be because you tend to take shallow breaths. This can be the case if you have asthma, other conditions that affect your lungs, or if you are feeling anxious. Don't worry if it is hard to relax and breathe more deeply. Through doing this breathing exercise regularly it will become more natural to breathe diaphragmatically rather than shallowly. You could try breathing in through your nose and blowing out gently through your mouth to see if that helps you to relax. Breathe in this way for a minute or two, or longer if you enjoy its calming effect. Just stop at any point if you feel discomfort.

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.