

Don't let being in a wheelchair keep you from being active. You may be able to do exercises such as arm cranking. You can also do the stretches and exercises below, which can help you:

- Become more flexible
- Build muscle and bone strength
- Be more comfortable and independent

Be safe

To prevent injury and maximize your results:

- Warm up before you stretch or exercise. For example, do 5–10 minutes of wheeling if possible. If not, do a few gentle sets of each exercise that you are planning to do.
- Keep your movements *slow and steady*. Do not jerk or lock your joints.
- Breathe out on the effort, such as when you lift your arms. Do not hold your breath.
- Stop if you feel pain or dizziness. Take a break. If you still feel pain or dizziness, talk with your doctor before you continue.
- Eat a light meal or snack at least one hour before exercising.
- Drink plenty of water before, during, and after exercising. A good rule of thumb is to weigh yourself before and after exercising, and then drink two cups of water for each pound you lose.

Warm-up exercises**• Neck range of motion**

- Tilt your head fully forward, and then lift your chin up without dropping your head backward. Repeat 5 to 10 times.
- Tilt your head to the right and then to the left. Keep your chin lifted and do not drop it toward your shoulder. Repeat 5 to 10 times.
- Rotate your head to the right and then to the left. Keep your chin lifted and do not drop it toward your shoulder. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

• Shoulder circles

- Sit tall. Make big circles with your shoulders, moving them up, back, and then down. Emphasize the back and down motions. Do not move your shoulders forward.
- Do not let your back arch or bend forward.
- Do not move your head.
- Repeat 10 times.



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Stretches

- **Side of neck**

Pull your head to one side, taking your ear toward your shoulder, while holding onto the chair with your other hand. Keep both shoulders down and back, and do not let your head move forward.



- **Back of neck**

Place one hand on the shoulder blade on the same side, with your elbow as high as possible. Turn your head away from that side. With the other hand, pull your head down and toward the opposite side. Keep both shoulders down.



- **Chest**

Place your fingertips above and behind your ears. Pull your elbows back without pushing your head forward, arching your back, or lifting your shoulders. Do not clasp your hands.



- **Mid-Back**

Sit with your chair angled toward the corner of your desk. Reach across your body to hold the corner of your desk with one hand so that it is in front of your opposite knee. Pull your body backwards, rounding your mid-back. Tuck your head down and toward the corner of the desk.



- **Triceps**

With one arm bent behind your head, grasp your elbow and push it downward, squeezing the elbow together.



Strengthening exercises

Follow these guidelines:

- Talk with your doctor before starting or increasing your exercise program. Your doctor may advise you to try certain exercises or avoid others.
- Start by sitting up tall in your wheelchair.
- Use proper form. Do the exercise first with no added weight. This helps you learn proper form. If possible, have a qualified professional show you how to do new exercises.
- Each time you complete an exercise is called a repetition. For example, lifting a weight and then lowering it is one repetition. Gradually increase the number of repetitions you do until you are comfortable doing 10-15 repetitions.
- When you can properly do an exercise with your body weight only for 10–15 repetitions, add one-pound free weights. If you don't have free weights, use 16-ounce bottles of water.
- Each continuous series of repetitions is called one "set." For example, doing 10 bicep curls in a row without taking a break is considered one set. Over time, you may find it easy to complete one set. At that time, begin to build up to a second set with the same weight. When you are ready for the next advancement, only increase your weight on the second set.
- Typically, only do 1–3 sets of 10–15 repetitions each.
- Rest for 1 to 2 minutes between sets that exercise the same muscles.

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Wheelchair Exercises

- When you can do 2 sets easily, add a little more weight. For example, move from 1-pound to 2-pound free weights.
- Never lift more weight than you can handle safely and properly. Example: When doing arm exercises, you should not arch or curl your back, and not move your head or strain your neck.
- Move slowly, smoothly, and continuously.
- Use your full range of motion as long as it does not cause pain.
- Do not hold your breath. Ideally, breathe out as you move away from your starting position. Breathe in as you return.
- Do the exercises that use larger muscles and/or multiple joints before doing exercises that use only one. For example, do overhead presses before doing bicep curls. Do bicep curls before doing wrist curls.
- Skip at least 1 day before exercising the same muscles. This gives your muscles time to recover.
- Stop if you feel sudden muscular pain, severe muscular fatigue, or joint pain.
- **Overhead press**
 - Lift both arms so that your elbows are bent and shoulder-high with your hands up toward the ceiling. Keep your elbows as far back and down as they comfortably go.
 - Reach your hands up toward the ceiling until fully extended.
 - Return slowly back to your starting position.
- **Bicep curls**
 - Start with your elbows bent and your hands down at your sides. Have your palms facing upward.
 - Bring your hands up, bending at the elbow, so that your palms face your chest.
 - Slowly lower your hands back down.
- **Lateral raises**
 - Start with your arms extended down at your sides with your palms facing your body. Do not lock your elbows. Keep your arms slightly bent.
 - Lift both elbows to shoulder height, keeping your arms extended.
 - Slowly lower both arms down to your sides.
- **Triceps extensions**
 - Sit forward and turned slightly toward one side.
 - Start with your weight on your right arm while that elbow rests on your leg.
 - Lift the left elbow behind you.
 - Extend your left arm, keeping that elbow high.
 - Slowly bend your elbow back to the starting position, keeping your elbow high.
 - Repeat on the opposite side.

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Wheelchair Exercises

• Wrist curls

- Put your forearms, palms up, on the arms of your wheelchair so that your hands extend over the edge.
- Bend your wrists, bring your hands up and then lower them down slowly. Do not let your forearms move.
- Turn your hands over, and repeat with your palms facing down.

• Grip holds

- Place a tennis ball in each hand.
- Squeeze the balls as slowly and tightly as you can. Hold the squeeze for 5 seconds.
- Slowly relax your hand.

You can stretch again when you are finished doing the strengthening exercises.

Ready for more?

Over time, you may want to add more stretches and strengthening exercises. Talk with a UPMC Health Plan health coach or a qualified fitness trainer. Ask about aerobic exercise too. Aerobic exercise makes your lungs and heart work harder and is an important part of being fit.

Take Action

Think about the coming week. In the chart below, make a plan to do stretches and strengthening exercises. The first line shows an example.

Day	Exercises, When
Wednesday	Stretches, arm curls, wrist curls, cool down (1 p.m.)
Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	



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