

# Chair-based exercises

If you have difficulty standing or walking, it needn't mean exercise is out of the question. Professor Patrick Doherty, Chair in Cardiovascular Health at the University of York, offers some chair-based exercises you can try at home.

We all know that being physically active is good for us, but not everyone can take part in activities like [walking](#), [cycling](#) or aerobics classes. If that's the case for you, but you want to [keep active](#), then chair-based exercise could be just what you're looking for.

You can use these exercises if you have trouble getting up and about, or even if you just want a change of activity on days you can't get outdoors.

If you have a health condition, check with your GP before you start. There are specific exercise programmes for people with a heart condition that your GP, cardiologist or [cardiac rehab](#) team can help you with.

Chair-based exercise can be done at home or in small groups and is easy to fit in to your daily routine. Set realistic goals for yourself. For example, you could aim to do ten to 20 minutes every other day for two weeks. Then, if you achieve that and don't get too tired, you could plan to do more or carry on for a few more weeks and then reassess your goal.

Even a small amount of activity can be a tremendous boost to our wellbeing and help you to tone and strengthen. So why not give it a go? You might be surprised at just how good it makes you feel.

Read our guide to [chair-based yoga](#).

## The six rules of chair-based exercise

1. Always use a strong chair, preferably with armrests and not too soft. When you sit in the chair, your thighs should be parallel with the floor. See exercise one.
2. Keep your arm and leg movements steady, as this will help avoid muscle and joint strain. In the early stages, move your arms or legs one at a time. As you get more skilful, you can combine arm and leg movements in the same exercise. Ten to 12 repetitions per minute are normally enough, but you are the best judge of what you can manage.
3. Warm up and cool down. When you start moving, the blood supply to the heart muscle needs a few minutes to reach optimal flow. Any combination of these exercises can be done gently to warm up or cool down, while you can do them more vigorously for the main part of your

exercise session.

4. Don't exercise too hard. Aim for moderate-intensity exercise, which means you are slightly breathless and perhaps warmer than usual. Some days or weeks may be better than others, so adjust the intensity of the exercise to how you're feeling.
5. Never hold your breath while exercising. You'd be surprised just how often we forget to breathe when lifting our arms and legs or staying balanced.
6. Keep your arm exercise below head height. This means the heart doesn't have to pump so hard against gravity and will help to reduce breathlessness.

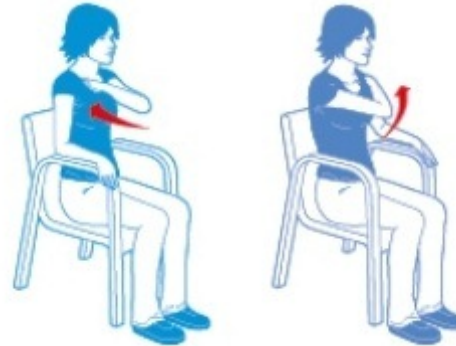
## 1. Alternate leg heel digs

As one foot moves out to place the heel on the floor, the other foot remains planted on the ground. As the heel is placed on the ground, try to pull your toe towards your shin.



## 2. Alternate arm across body

Raise your right hand diagonally and touch your left shoulder. Return your right hand to the arm of the chair. Repeat motion, this time using your left hand to touch your right shoulder. Only reach as far across as is comfortable for you.

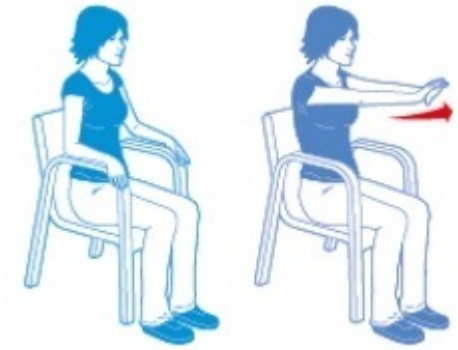
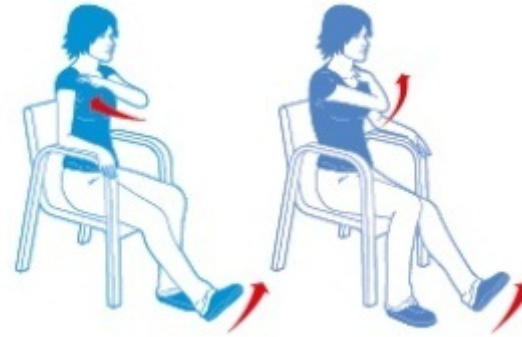


## 3. Double arm forward and back to the armrest

Push both hands forward to shoulder height. Your wrists should be extended. Coordination is important so, if possible, try to alternate which hand is in front of the other as your arms are forward.

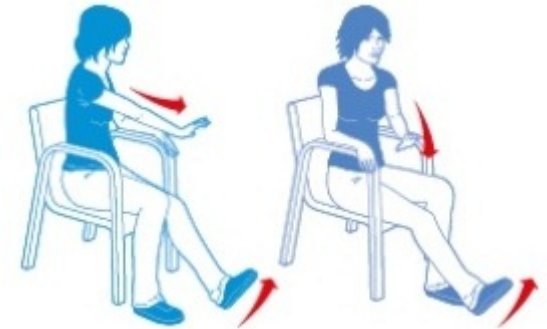
#### 4. Alternate single arm across body with heel digs

Raise your right hand diagonally and touch your left shoulder. Simultaneously extend your left leg and plant heel on the ground. Return your right hand to the arm of the chair and your left leg to a relaxed position. Repeat motion, this time using your left hand to touch your right shoulder, while extending your right leg.



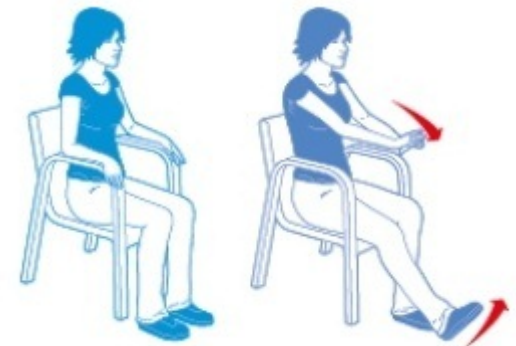
#### 5. Alternate arm and leg

Push your leg forward and your opposite hand across your body, keeping your wrist extended. Your fingertips should be level with your shoulder. Only reach as far as is comfortable for you. With alternate arm and leg exercises such as this, it's important that as one arm is moving, the other is supported on the chair, and the supporting foot is planted firmly on the floor.



#### 6. Double arm forward with heel digs

Push your hands out slightly higher than your shoulder, in line with your chin, keeping your wrists extended. Only reach as far out as is comfortable for you. Coordination is important, so try to alternate which arm is in front of the other.



## **Find out more**

Talk to your healthcare professional to find out about exercise programmes to suit your level of ability.

[Read more about being active](#)

## **More useful information**