

Adapt: Managing orthostatic intolerance

Many people recovering from post-viral fatigue experience an increase in symptoms when standing upright. Orthostatic intolerance is the development of symptoms while standing upright that are relieved or partially relieved by reclining. Some people may experience breathlessness, dizziness, nausea, increase in heart rate, and palpitations.

In this document, we have outlined some tips that can help you manage the symptoms associated with orthostatic intolerance.



Environmental and postural adjustments

- When rising from a lying position to a seated position, go slowly to give your body time to adjust
- If sitting, have your feet on the floor or supported on a stool, rather than unsupported or dangling
- Avoid prolonged periods of bedrest to support blood circulation
- Avoid prolonged periods of standing to support blood circulation through movement
- Avoid warm environments like taking a hot bath/shower or being in a hot room
- Avoid dehydration by drinking 2-3 litres of water per day in order to increase blood volume

Precautions before starting a movement program

DO NOT START a movement program if you are experiencing any of the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing while resting
- Chest pain or palpitations (fluttering of heart in chest)
- New swelling in your legs
- Post-exertional malaise. Please refer to the “Plan: What is pacing” handout for more information



STOP your movement program if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Cool, clammy skin
- Excessive fatigue
- Irregular heart beat

Modified exercise

This section has been adapted from [Dysautonomia International](#). Movement can help to manage orthostatic intolerance. Start physical activity slowly, and increase based on your tolerance, rather than trying to follow a rigid plan. Please consult your medical professional before starting any new exercise program.

Below, we have outlined some ways that you can modify your physical activity to reduce your symptoms.

1. STRENGTH TRAINING

Emphasis placed on leg and core strength.

Beginning phase

In a lying position. Start with isometric exercises. Isometric means that you contract and release your muscles without moving your body. Here are some ideas to get started:

- Leg pillow squeeze. Lie on your side on a bed or couch. Place a pillow between your legs, and then use your muscles to gently squeeze the pillow. Start with 3-5 repetitions, rest, and if you are able to, repeat the set.
- Arm pillow squeeze.
- Gentle stretching. Any kind of stretching helps move blood around the body and takes stress off being in the same position for long periods.



Building phase

In this phase we are looking to increase your tolerance in the sitting position. Here are some ideas to get started:

- Try the "Beginning phase" exercises in an upright seated position to your own tolerance. Take lying rests as you need them.
- Weight training with emphasis placed on strengthening leg and core muscles. If you feel ready to do so, consult with a physiotherapist for further instruction for your exercise program.

Being phase

In this phase we are looking to increase your tolerance in the standing position. Here are some ideas to get started:

- Calf raises
- Squatting
- Stand with legs crossed to compensate for increase of symptoms in standing position

2. AEROBIC EXERCISE

Standing up may be a problem and non-upright exercise may be more appropriate. Here are some ideas to get started:

Beginning phase

Start exercise in a horizontal (semi-reclined) position such as slow cycling at a low level on a laid-back reclining bike.

Building phase

Exercise in a horizontal (semi-reclined) position; for example, cycling on a laid-back reclining bike, rowing machine, or swimming.

Being phase

Increase tolerance to exercise in a standing posture when you are able to tolerate it. Progress to an upright bike or walking.



Compression garments

Compression garments may help some people reduce excessive blood pooling in their legs.

- Wearing compression garments such as tight yoga wear
- Abdominal binders
- Compression socks (for example used for air travel)

Please consult your health professional for questions regarding compression garments.