

How to overcome problems of getting weaker with Post Polio Syndrome.

I caught the polio virus in 1949 and was sent home after about 4 weeks in hospital. I was unable to walk at first, so my mother started to rehabilitate me with daily exercises. Later she found a physiotherapist who was trained in the method developed by Sister Kenny, an Australian nurse.

I regained several muscles except for the left leg below the knee where the paralysis started. I was unable to walk for a year, and then I started walking with two crutches, then just one, and finally one stick. My endurance increased gradually, and I was able to attend school, university, and jobs in chemical laboratories. I studied Chemistry at university where I met my husband who was also studying chemistry. After graduating we married, and we had three daughters. I became a science teacher. Teaching was better suited to looking after children and I was able to stand all day, carry heavy books, teaching in science laboratories for 26 years.

Shortly before turning 60, I retired from teaching and trained as a chiropodist. My children had left home, and I was able to visit people in their homes pulling my heavy bag full of instruments and chiropody supplies on wheels which was meant for a suitcase. Luckily, I was also able to have a dedicated surgery in our home and see patients there. Gradually as I became weaker, I stopped visiting and became even busier with patients in the surgery. So much so that I would not even stand up from 9 to 12 and for several hours in the afternoon with patients following one another. I now realise that this was detrimental to my muscles. I also started studying for an Open University degree online which meant many hours sitting at the computer in the evenings. I now know that I should have been doing more activities to preserve my muscles instead of sitting for long hours. Having fallen down our wooden stairs three times I was forced to have a stairlift. The result of that is that now I am hardly able to climb the stairs. To try and remedy this I am now using a small stepping stool in the kitchen and holding onto the work surface with one hand and a sturdy chair with the other I try to step up every morning and evening. I started with just 5 repetitions and gradually increased it to 20. But I can only step up with my right leg. I am not persistent, so I tend to give up easily when I am tired in the evenings.

My balance is getting very bad, I need to hold onto a firm surface. Even when using two sticks I don't like to be far from something to hold onto or lean against. To be able to carry heavy pans, serving dishes, or anything to go in the oven, I have a small stool on castors. This is also useful for getting things out of the fridge, putting clothes in the washing machine, and taking them out, cleaning the floor, vacuuming, and as an extra chair. It is important to be able to stand up from it safely, holding on to a kitchen chair and the table. A few times I have missed standing up, tried to sit back on the stool, and ended up on the floor! A very embarrassing situation.

My greatest problem at present is standing up. My husband fixed 4-inch raisers on the settee and on our bed which helps a great deal. I need to pull myself up with one hand while pushing up with the other. I also have to take care not to damage my shoulders when doing this.

The lesson from all this is: keep walking, use the stairs, and do exercises as long as possible to preserve muscles but do not to get overtired because that damages the nerves and muscles.

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