



## Are your residents sitting comfortably? If not they may be adding further pressures to your care staff

Winter is a time of year when it is difficult for care home residents to get out much. It may be cold outside and more time is spent indoors and in chairs. But can you be sure that residents are sitting correctly and not making existing conditions worse?

To put it simply, posture is the way in which your muscles and skeleton hold your body in its upright position. Posture affects breathing, muscle growth, mobility and when it is asymmetrical – that is when one side of the body is used more than the other – it can cause a range of pain conditions and health problems.

But how can we improve posture if mobility is reduced? Dr Hilary Jones together with specialist seating manufacturer, Repose Furniture Ltd, has designed a visual guide, which looks at posture and good seating.

Dr Hilary provides a few of his thoughts and recommendations on how simple exercises can make a difference and how, contrary to belief, resting joints is not the answer to reduce pain and discomfort. In fact, the correct type of exercise is not only helpful, but also vital for maintaining the mobility of joints and keeping muscles around them strong, in turn improving posture.

"Joints are designed to move and when the cartilage that covers bone ends erodes over time, the joints become stiffer and more painful and mobility becomes difficult and limited," explains Dr Hilary.



Dr Hilary Jones with Repose and Lisa Worsley

"Putting the joints through a full range of movement, without jarring impact and weight bearing, is generally recommended. Gentle, regular exercise can stretch out stiff muscles and frozen joints as well as strengthening the muscles around them, which in turn improves posture."

Some simple but effective exercises to get residents moving

For people with limited mobility, whenever exercising, it is always advisable to begin with gentle exercises and build up gradually to more challenging ones. The correct type should not lead to any discomfort so listen to your body and adjust your exercise levels accordingly. Some of the exercises proposed can easily be carried out in a supportive seat for those that have restricted mobility and, exercising in those circumstances should be encouraged.

### 1. Stretching

Ideally you should try to put your joints through a full range of movement on a daily basis. Get into a routine and stick to it. You might like to start with your neck and work downward through the body. With your neck let your head fall forwards onto your chest and let it stay there for a few seconds. Then straighten up and drop your head to the left side for a few seconds before straightening up again and dropping it to the other side.

### 2. Shoulders

With your arms by your side, circle your shoulders forwards five times and then rotate them backwards five times also. Now lift your arms above your head pushing them backwards as much as possible. Keep your arms tight up against your ears, hold that position for a few seconds, and then slowly bring them down sideways.



### 3. Elbows

Start with your arms straight down by your side now bend them up towards your shoulders. Now bend your elbows to a right angle with your palms facing downwards and rotate them upwards and downwards ten times.

### 4. Wrists and hands

With your hands outstretched, bend your wrists up and down to their full limit. Spread out your fingers and then make fists. Do this ten times. Bring your thumb together with your index finger, push them together, and then touch the tips of your other fingers with your thumb. Repeat this on both hands.

### 5. Hips

Standing behind your chair, lift first your left leg and swing it backwards behind you as far as it will go, later repeating this exercise with the right leg.

### 6. Knees

Sit on your bed with your back supported with pillows behind you and your legs straight out in front of you. Push the backs of your knees down into the mattress feeling your thigh muscles tighten as you do this. Hold that position for a few seconds. In the same position, lift your left leg up, keeping the knee entirely straight until your foot is about six inches above the bed. Hold this for a few seconds before repeating it on the other side.

### 7. Ankles and feet

In the seated position, rotate your ankles in circles clockwise and anticlockwise. Now bend your toes up towards your knees and then bend them downwards as if you were on points like a ballet dancer.

### An integrated approach

Exercise ensures that residents remain not only physically but also emotionally fit. The emotional effects of exercise have a huge impact on the quality of life, especially for those that are confined mainly to either bed or sitting in a chair for a large part of the day.

What's more, there are many ways to help reduce the pain and discomfort caused as a result of limited mobility and it should also be a preventative measure too, warding off stiff joints before it gets to that stage.

Working with the support of GPs and Occupational Therapists, an exercise routine for residents can be achieved and plans tailored to an individual's specific needs to help them carry out every day activities as efficiently as possible without straining joints and causing more serious complications.

Care professionals are an extremely valuable source of support in understanding what is needed not just in terms of an exercise programme but also in providing advice on the right assisted aids to help with bathing and climbing stairs. How a person is supported in a chair has a huge impact on posture and ultimately, their comfort.

The chair becomes one of the most important pieces of furniture for those with mobility restrictions so selecting the right specialist furniture is extremely important. It should not be over-looked but with an array of seating available, choosing the right solution can be a confusing exercise.

There are the considerations of posture and pressure management to provide comfort and care for the user as well as the working environment in which the chair will be operated. This requires a good understanding of the chair, its functionality, and the seat cushion and back cushion design, all

imperative to the long term wellbeing of the user. By talking to experts in the sector, you will be able to tailor your seating either by individual or multiple user requirement.

When selecting a seating solution care professionals should consider chairs which can be adapted over time, either as a healthcare issue progresses, or for multiple users with differing postural requirements. Repose chairs, for instance, offer multiple adjustments which includes seat depth and leg support options. Further to this users can request additional back cushion designs and alternative pressure management seat cushions, which is key when adapting the chair for multiple users.

All these factors are important and integrating exercise together with the right assisted aids, particularly seating, will make a positive difference and provide numerous benefits both in the short and long term.

