Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust

Graded Exposure

Patient Information Leaflet

MSK Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service

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What is graded exposure?

Graded exposure means **slowly** and **safely bringing back movements or activities** that you may have stopped doing because of pain or fear of injury.

After pain or an injury, it is normal to feel worried about certain movements like bending, lifting, running or exercising. Avoiding these movements for too long can make your body **less able to cope**, and your pain can feel stronger. This can slow down recovery.

Graded exposure helps you return to these movements in a **steady, controlled way**.

How does graded exposure work?

Instead of avoiding a movement completely, you bring it back in **small, manageable steps**. This helps your body to:

- build strength
- build confidence
- reduce sensitivity
- increase how much activity you can manage

Over time this can help reduce pain and make everyday tasks easier.

Example 1: Bending

If bending is difficult or painful, build it up slowly:

1. Start with bending exercises whilst sitting.
2. When this feels easier, try bending whilst standing.

3. Then add a small amount of weight, and slowly increase it as your body adapts.

These steps help your body get used to bending again without overwhelming it.

Example 2: Walking

If walking for 20 minutes is too much:

1. Start with a 10-minute walk you can manage most days.
2. When this feels comfortable, increase your walking time by one minute at a time.
3. This slow increase helps your body adapt without causing a flare-up.

Why this approach works

Think of it like training for a marathon. A runner would not try to run the whole marathon on day one. They would slowly build up their distance over weeks or months.

Your body works the same way.

Small, steady increases help your tissues get stronger and more tolerant. This can reduce pain over time.

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If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format such as large print, Braille or audio, please ask a member of staff.

MSK Physiotherapy Service

Find out more about the MSK Physiotherapy Service and what we offer www.leicspart.nhs.uk/service/musculoskeletal-msk-therapy-physiotherapy/

Further Resources

Access our other MSK Physiotherapy resources www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/

Date implemented: Apr 2026
Last review: Apr 2026
Review date: Apr 2028
Leaflet Reference. CHS MSK 04 Graded Exposure Edition 1