

Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes



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Ok in my last article we talked about what I can do for the upper neck and head, but I don't profess to do anything with what goes on in between the ears. Toes can be painful but it is not a high percentage of what we see in physical therapy. So let's talk about shoulder and knees.

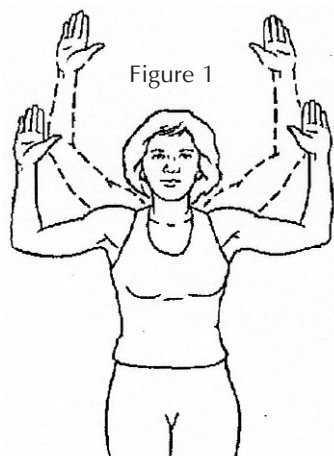


Figure 1

strap behind your back becomes impossible), reaching overhead, sometimes just getting the milk out of the refrigerator can be very painful.

Like most injuries the best answer to recovery is exercise. When a shoulder starts hurting due to lack of mobility it is critical to add mobility as soon as possible. There are many activities/exercises that can be done to increase your flexibility. At first, they may be painful, and you should start cautiously. Figure 1 demonstrates just lifting both arms overhead is an exercise to start loosening the shoulder.

The next is what I call "stick-em-up" exercise (it's what I would do if someone said "sitck-em-up"). Figure 2. This exercise works on several movements of the shoulder to increase flexi-

bility, and can be performed either standing or lying down with your knees bent.

Strengthening is next. Weights can be "made" by going into your pantry. A bag of beans or popcorn, (they usually weigh 2 pounds) or a can that fits in your hand can be utilized as weights. Lift your arm up to shoulder height. Start with one set of 10 repetitions, add sets of 10 until you can do 3 sets, then increase the weight. Progress as you can tolerate. Lifting you arm sideways is another good strengthening exercise. Increasing

strength of the upper extremities enables us to perform our regular tasks, groceries, laundry, briefcases, and children much easier.

OK, now our knees. We blame knee pain on everything from heredity to concrete floors. Quite often an injury from sports is the reason for knee pain.

Many women develop knee pain due to a lack of strength (yes if you haven't realized yet there is a common theme to these articles...strength and flexibility). The muscle that works the knee in the front of the thigh is called the quadriceps. The strength of this muscle determines how strong our knee is, and it can rapidly decline in strength if we don't do something to maintain it. If you're wondering how strong your thighs are, squat down and see if you can push yourself straight back up or if you have to lean forward and crawl back up your thighs. (Hint the crawling back up your thighs is an indication of poor strength.)

So how do you get this muscle stronger? Any type of step aerobics will include quadriceps strengthening, weight lifting, leg press, or partial squats.

See figure 3, this is an easy exercise with a terrific bang for your buck. Always bend one knee while lifting the other to protect your back. Lift the straight leg 6-8 inches off the floor and repeat 10 times. A good rule of thumb is to perform 100 of these leg lifts per exercise session, with 3-4 sessions per week. You can start off by doing 2-3 sets of 10 and progress to 10 sets of 10.

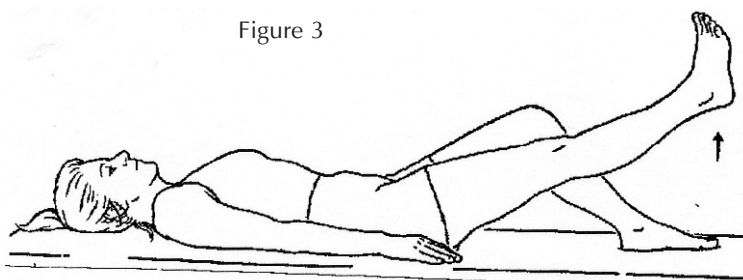


Figure 3

Switch from one leg to the other to build in a rest period for each leg.

The stronger your quadriceps are, the less strain your knee undergoes for all of your activities. You will find as you do the straight leg raises you will be getting up out of a chair, walking up and down stairs much easier.

So exercise is critical to maintaining our health, flexibility, and our ability to function in activities of daily living. Sure its hard to fit exercise in... learn to fit exercise into the cracks, perform the leg lifts while watching the news, perform your shoulder stretching exercises while you are waiting for morning coffee, park a little farther away, take the steps, do low back stretches while holding on the phone, and neck stretches while at a stop light. As you get started you'll find time to fit in a lot more than you thought you could! Best wishes to you.

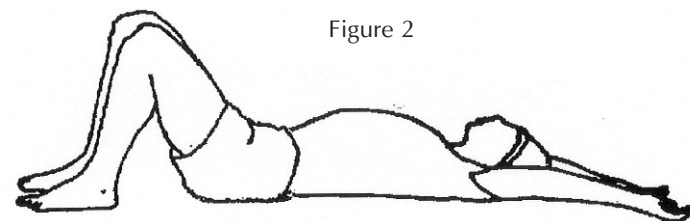


Figure 2

"..exercise is critical to maintaining our health, flexibility, and our ability to function in activities of daily living"

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Touted by physicians as one of the best physical therapists in St. Louis, Deb Lavender is a physical therapist with over 25 years of experience providing hands-on or manual therapy. Her vast experience has allowed her to develop special skills in neck and low back pain, plantar fasciitis, frozen shoulder, joint pain and replacement, and women's health issues (such as pain with pregnancy, pelvic floor pain, urinary incontinence, and osteoporosis). She owns Des Peres Physical Therapy in Des Peres and accepts all insurances.