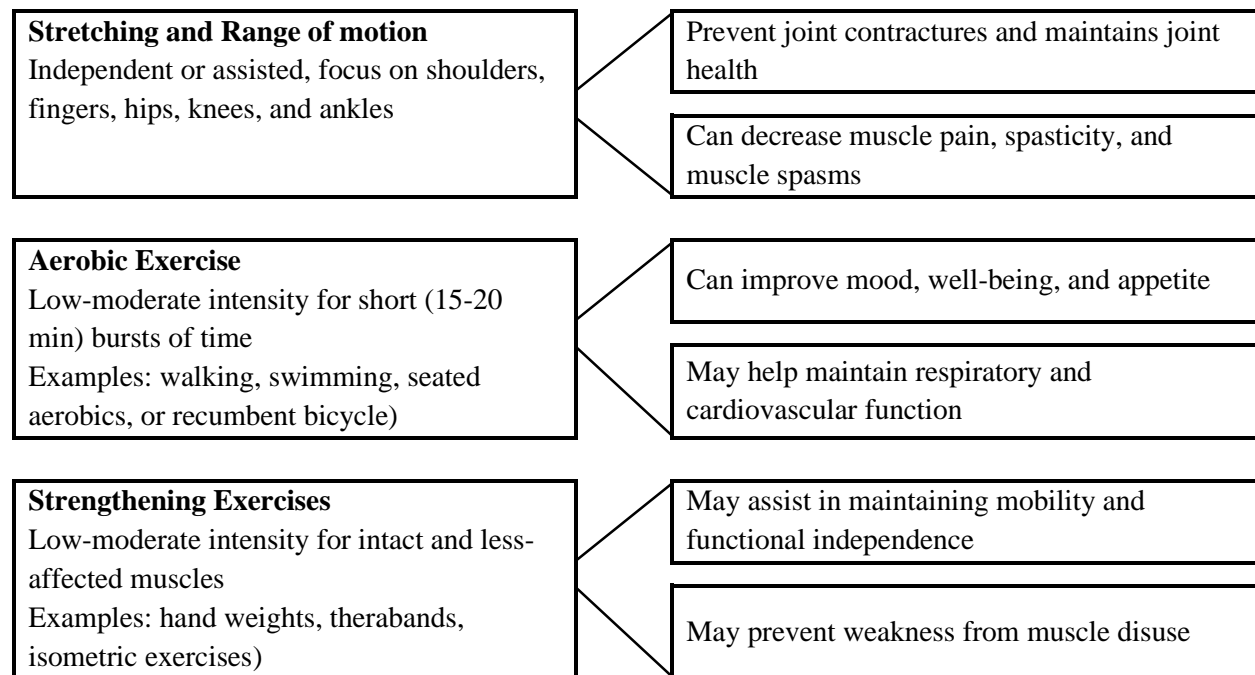


Exercise and ALS

This handout offers a brief overview of current research about exercising with ALS. However, exercise guidelines vary based on someone's goals, abilities, and pre-existing levels of physical fitness. It is always best to consult with a physiotherapist so you can follow an individualized exercise program designed to meet your unique needs.

Why Exercise is Important for a Diagnosis of ALS

Research suggests that many types of exercise can be beneficial for managing symptoms of ALS and maintaining functional abilities. Please remember that exercise is important, but it should **not** be prioritized over meaningful daily activities.



Cautions When Exercising with ALS

1. **Fall prevention** is essential. Be cautious with activities like hiking, skating, skiing, biking, etc.
2. Use any **assistive devices** required for your safety while exercising.
3. **Avoid highly repetitive or heavy resistance** exercise; it can damage weakened muscles.
4. Discontinue any exercise causing **pain, weakness, or cramping**.
5. **Extreme fatigue** or fatigue lasting **more than 1 hour** means an activity is too intense.
6. Avoid laboured breathing or increased **shortness of breath**.

Physiotherapy and ALS

Physiotherapists (PTs) are an important part of the ALS care team. They provide individual assessments and recommendations related to:

- Gait changes and mobility strategies
- Stretching routines for affected muscles and joints
- Home exercise programs / individual exercise recommendations related to your cardio, strength, and flexibility needs
- Safe transfers for clients and care partners
- Pain management strategies

Please be aware that while appropriate exercise can have many beneficial effects on your body, improper exercises can be dangerous or cause harm. It is very important to receive expert consultation from a physiotherapist before beginning any kind of exercise program.

Is Physiotherapy Covered by OHIP? / Where Should I go for Physio?

Option #1: Homecare Physiotherapy

- Offered in your home by Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs)
- Consultative model – approximately three sessions are approved per referral
- Can train personal support workers to assist with exercises on an ongoing basis
- Ask your ALS Clinic OT for a referral to initiate services or to update an exercise program that is no longer working for you

Option #2: Private Neurological Physiotherapy

- Available by self-referral to private clinics across Ontario.
- Often have extensive knowledge and experience with neurodegenerative disease
- Typically clients purchase a package of 5-10 sessions at a time.
- Ask your ALS Clinic OT for a prescription to submit to your insurance company

Option #3: OHIP-Funded Clinics

- Only available to select populations (over the age of 65 or recently hospitalized)
- Typically have long wait lists, but this varies by region
- Identify an eligible clinic in your area at http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/physio/pub_clinics.aspx then ask your ALS Clinic OT for a referral.

Any time you begin working with a new physiotherapist, ask if they have experience working with your diagnosis. Remember that you are the expert on your own body – if you do not feel safe when performing an exercise, stop doing it until your next visit with a healthcare provider.
