

Exercises for ME/CFS

Sit up slowly, stretch out the legs, hands on the floor behind the hips, with fingers pointing backwards. Ease the front of the ribcage forward and drop the head back. Curve the spine up into the back. Press down on the legs, sitting bones and hands to increase the backward bend. Now bring the head up and drop the chin forward to the chest to stretch the back of the neck.

Roll over and lie on your front, with head to one side and arms by your sides. Relax.

Back strengthening (preliminary exercise)

Lie with your forehead touching the floor. Slowly lift your head, looking along the floor and a little way up the wall, stretching the eye muscles upward as you do this. Slowly return to the floor. Now inhale when you lift and exhale when you lower. Resist the temptation to press on hands or feet – let the back muscles do the work. Repeat.

Relax, turning your head to the opposite side this time.

Back strengthening (crocodile posture with countermovement)

Lie with arms stretched out in front. Bend the elbows a little and prop up on your elbows with your chin cupped in your hands, elbows spaced apart to make this comfortable. If you prefer, lie flatter with your right hand on your left shoulder and the left hand on the right shoulder with your chin on the top arm. ('Lying crocodile' postures).

To increase the stretch up the front surface of the body, bend the right knee and pull the foot gently in towards your back. Lower it slowly. Repeat with the left leg. Inhale to lift and exhale to lower. Then lift both legs together.

Repeat the sequence. Relax.

Place hands under shoulders and push up onto hands and knees. Sit back on your heels and stretch your arms out on the floor about 18 inches in front of knees. (At first you can put a cushion between hips and heels if it's more comfortable). If you can, bring your head down level with the arms or down to the floor so that your head is lower than your heart – a stimulating position for blood circulation. However if this makes you dizzy, place your head on a cushion so that it is level with your heart.

Stretch your hips down to your heels and stretch the arms further and further forward to increase the stretch in the back and down the sides of the body. Breathe deeply. Now let your arms rest beside your legs, hands beside feet, allowing your shoulders to relax forward, opening the shoulder blades. Sit up slowly, bringing your head up last.



Semi-supine lying position

(for relaxing and balancing the body)

Lie on your back, preferably with your head on a 1" block or paperback book.

Have your knees bent up, feet flat to the floor, with ankles directly under the knees.

Keep your feet and knees together or, if it's more comfortable for your lower back, have them slightly apart, but keep the knees in line with the feet.

Place your hands on your abdomen, with elbows comfortably on the floor.



This is a relaxing, refreshing and balancing position for the body, helping to restore energy. Ideally, lie like this for 20 minutes twice daily.

Body/mind awareness (How am I today?)

Become aware of your body - its balance and symmetry. Check for areas of tension. Become aware of your mental state. Are there any pressures in your life at present? Become aware of your emotional state. Are you experiencing emotional stress, or is life on an even keel?

Awareness of your breathing

Does your breathing have a smooth and regular flow, or is it jerky and irregular?

Begin to breathe in through the nose with slow, regular, deep breaths, and slow out-breaths, always nostril breathing.

Progressive muscle tensing and releasing

(to activate your body with a minimum of effort).

Each exercise to be done 3 times.

Stretch legs out straight, arms alongside the body.

Wriggle the toes.

Stretch tops of feet by pointing toes forward, then stretch backs of legs by pushing heels forward and pulling toes back.

Tighten calf muscles, hold, then release.

Tighten around kneecaps and gently push backs of knees into the floor. Release



Tighten thigh muscles. Release. Tighten buttocks. Release. Stretch lumbar arch into the floor.

(Feel the abdomen slightly contract). Release.

Press the spine down between the shoulder blades, then release that part of the spine to the floor.

Open the chest, take shoulders back to the floor, then release.

Tighten upper arm muscles. Release.

Make fists and tighten forearms, pressing fists into the floor. Release.

Open hands, press palms down with fingers spread apart. Stretch into fingers. Release.

Tighten all facial muscles – clench jaw, screw up forehead, eyes, etc., then release. This brings warmth to the face and energy to the head.

Relax, and mentally go through the areas of the body you've used.



Arm and leg stretching (to stretch the body)

Breathe in. Take arms up and back behind your head as close to the floor as possible.

Breathe out. Return arms down to your sides.

Continue, keeping arms as straight as possible, coordinating breathing and arm movements.

Involve legs and feet, stretching on inhalation, relaxing on exhalation, sometimes pointing the toes when you stretch, sometimes stretching into the heels.

Stretch fingers, wrists, elbows, then relax.



Gentle back massage

Bring knees up to your chest and hold around them.

When you exhale, increase the stretch in your back by gently easing your thighs down toward your trunk.

As you inhale, the legs will move slightly away.

Repeat several times.

Keeping hold of the knees, gently rock from side to side into the muscles on either side of the spine, slowly moving your weight from one side to the other.

Keeping knees together, gently guide them around in a circle – to one side, forward, to the other side, then down toward your chest again. Continue slowly and smoothly, coordinating the movement with your breathing – breathe in as you push the circle away, breathe out as the knees come down.

Now reverse the circle, still working in coordination with your breathing. Finish with knees to the centre and drop your feet to the floor. Relax your back.



Gentle spinal twist with countermovement

Keeping knees bent, ankles under knees, with knees and insides of feet together, take the arms out to the sides level with the shoulders. Slowly take your knees to the right. At the same time, look towards your left hand. Return knees and head to the centre.

Repeat on the other side – knees to the left, head to the right. Continue the twisting movement slowly and smoothly, exhaling as you go into the twisting, and inhaling as you return to the centre.

Keep the feet together. Don't force the stretch – eventually your knees will reach the floor. Repeat the sequence several times. Return arms to sides. Relax.



Countermovement: hip raising and lowering

Stretch the back of your neck into the floor, bringing your chin down towards your throat. Slowly lift your lower and some of the middle spine off the floor, pressing down on your arms and feet, then slowly lower your spine.

Continue, lifting as many vertebrae as you can off the floor, then lower them carefully one at a time, keeping the neck flat. To assist the lift, tighten everything under the body – backs of thighs, buttocks, lower back – and relax when you lower the spine.

Inhale as you lift and exhale as you lower. This will also work your knees. Repeat several times. Bring the knees up to the chest, hugging them tight to stretch into the back. Return the feet to the floor. Relax.



Spinal stretching

Sit up with legs out straight, hands firmly on the floor beside hips. Make legs strong, toes upright. Straighten and strengthen the back by pressing down into 'sitting bones'. Press all the pressure areas down – legs, hips, hands. Sit looking straight ahead, breathing deeply. Feel the spine lengthening and the crown of the head lifting. Then slightly release the stretch.

Bend the knees and hug your arms under the legs. If you can, bring your chest down to contact the thighs. Slowly slide your feet a little way forward, pause, and relax your back, opening the back. Slide the feet further forward. Again, relax the back and the folded arms. Continue until you've reached your ultimate stretch. Stay in it while you are comfortable, relaxing your back, shoulders, folded arms, under the hips and legs. Breathe deeply and slowly. Eventually you may be able to stretch the legs out straight.

