



Zoe Birch is a Chartered Physiotherapist and founder of PhysioMotion, which operate three London clinics as well as providing physiotherapy at home. In her fourth contribution to **SEBRA NEWS W2** Zoe highlights the different effects that lockdown has had on people's physical activity.

LOCKDOWN: A TALE OF TWO HALVES

What have you been doing during the lockdown? People's need to keep active, but with limited options, has led to many changing their exercise routines.

At PhysioMotion, we have seen two main changes: We have seen some who have suddenly increased their physical activity (using the time they would have otherwise commuted), and we have also seen those whose activity levels have dramatically reduced.

As a result of this, we have had people contacting us due to new pains, feeling weaker and being unsteady on their feet or stiffness in their joints. These complaints have come from both groups of people but for different reasons.

I am sure you will have seen an increased amount of people running and walking in the park, and cycling on the roads due to the reduction in motor traffic. This has been from the young to the elderly, which as a physiotherapist is great to see, as there are almost one third of adults and a fifth of children that are categorised as obese in the UK. As well as all the negatives this normally brings, we have also learnt that being overweight can lead to poorer outcomes if contracting COVID-19.

For the first group, it is great that they are getting more active and hopefully they will continue this activity after lockdown has been completely lifted.

If you are suffering from some new pains since you have started increasing your activity levels to get a break from your desk or enjoy the gorgeous weather we are having, here are three things to think about:

1. Start slowly with a short distance or lighter weights, and gradually increase within your comfort. Sudden increase

of activity or load on the body can cause irritation to the soft tissue structures, such as muscle or tendons

- 2. Vary your activity between high and low load activities. This could be running on the high load days and walking on the low load days. Performing a physical activity every day isn't a problem, you just want to vary the intensity as the low load days will be a rest day for your body to recover and keep your bones and tissues health**
- 3. Fuel yourself with the right food and drink to complete the task and also help with the body's recovery afterwards. If this isn't correct, you are at risk of injury because your bone and soft tissues are unable to rejuvenate and repair themselves adequately**

For the other group whose activity levels have reduced, they are experiencing:

- **Joint pain, especially in the neck and back due to reduced flexibility and muscle tightness**
- **General stiffness in muscles and reduced range of movement**
- **Difficulty sleeping which is important for your physical and mental recovery**
- **Increased body weight, which puts more stress on joints and muscles**

For the elderly or other vulnerable population, they are also experiencing:

- **Fearfulness of falling, especially if they are isolated**
- **Difficulty getting in and out of their bed and chair due to reduced muscle strength**
- **Increased level of fatigue when moving around their homes, which reduces their ability to stay active in their homes**

All of the above is associated with inactivity and prolonged periods of immobility, as the body requires you to move to keep it healthy, mobile and strong. It is also an easy way to relieve tension and stress from your body.

For those of you that are not restricted to your home, why not schedule a daily physical activity outside that takes as long as your commuting time to and from work. This could be a walk, cycle,



Zoe's simple message:
Stay active, but don't over-train.

run or attending a workout class online- there are lots to choose from and within everyone's finances.

For the people who are restricted to home or working hours at a desk have increased, there are lots of exercises that take 2-5 minutes that you can perform within your home. You could set a reminder or timer every hour to perform an exercise between 8-15 repetitions and have a different one each time, and by the end of the day you would have performed a full body workout. These could be sit to stand from your chair, press ups, sit ups or even step ups which can be tailored to the person's current ability.

During the lockdown period, we are providing a free 30 minute general body weight workout via Zoom which targets the whole body to help with maintaining strength, flexibility and balance. If you would like to join us send us an email to info@physiomotion.co.uk

In conclusion movement is better than no movement, but we just need to be realistic in what our body can perform. As they say practice makes perfect, therefore the more you practise being active the easier it will be.

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