

Post-polio has resulted in quadriceps weakness that makes me have to use my arms to get up from a chair or toilet. Last winter my shoulders became quite painful, which I assumed was arthritis.

... from Clara Reiss

In mid-winter, I was referred to the Rusk Vestibular Clinic for balance retraining. Two physical therapists came to get me in the waiting room. They saw me getting up with my hands placed on the chair arms so that my fingers pointed toward my body, my elbows out away from my torso. They screamed together, "Don't do that!" and said that it could lead to my rotator cuffs being torn. They then instructed me to place my hands on chair arms in the opposite way, with my fingers pointing out, away from my body, leaving my elbows close to my torso. Within a month, the shoulder pain was gone.

Holly Wise, PT, PhD, Medical University of South Carolina comments, "The position of the individual's shoulders during the original chair push-up (fingers pointed in towards body) was one of internal rotation and promoted rounded shoulders which can impinge the rotator cuff causing pain, etc. By switching the position of the hands, the shoulders became externally rotated opening up the chest and improving posture, apparently eliminating the biomechanical impingement of the rotator cuff."

Robbie Leonard, PT, Leonard Physical Therapy, Inc, South Carolina, comments, "The way Clara describes is the better way of getting out of a chair, and she has the muscle strength to do so. Some folks who use unusual positioning for performing functional techniques do so because they are using the muscles that they have."

After being diagnosed with post-polio syndrome, I went online to discover what it was and everything I read seemed to warn sternly against exercising. I quit my daily swims and home exercise routine, and finally retired. Several years later I was overweight and depressed and felt totally desperate. I read Dr. Julie Silver's heartening article "Polio Myths and Half-Truths" (*Post-Polio Health*, Vol. 18, No. 2), and decided to start exercising again. It took all my strength just to get down on the floor to do one sit-up and then get up again. Then I did one bend-over. And that's all per day for a month. Then I could do two each day, then twice a day. Immediately I felt better.

... from Margaret
(Peggy) Whitcomb

By the end of three years I was "really" exercising and 1000% better, physically and emotionally. Amazingly, my endurance keeps increasing and some strength as well. Through it all, however, other survivors have predicted terrible collapse.

I also began to study my nutritional needs, deciding on high protein with carbs provided in fresh vegetables, some fruit, berries and nuts. I eat small meals several times a day, as well as taking vitamins and various supplements. Within four years I lost the fifty pounds I had put on, and that is a huge relief.

It seems to me that not every motor neuron in my body was polio damaged. I've depended on the unaffected muscles for over 60 years to support me. I've come to view myself as a whole, with some areas weakened by disease but all of my body and mind and spirit working together to stay as healthy as possible. I discipline myself and compensate where necessary. I pace myself every day in all activities including exercise. That is, as Dr. Silver noted, the key. Well, the first key was accepting post-polio syndrome. ▲