

Preventing contractures

You may know someone who needs support if this is you or a family member this leaflet may be helpful.

What is a contracture?

- “A condition of shortening and hardening of muscles, tendons, or other tissue, often leading to deformity and rigidity of joints.”
- Contractures can occur in different parts of the body
- Limits the movement in an area of the body where two or more bones connect.
- Skin can become tight, limiting movement



With permission from Middlesbrough council and Symmetrikit 2017

Who can get contractures?

Anyone can develop these however people at most risk are...

- People who are unable to move or have restricted movements this may be due to mobility difficulties or pain such as those with rheumatoid arthritis
- Those who have a degenerative condition such as multiple sclerosis or motor neurone disease
- People who have had a stroke or brain injury
- People with dementia or learning difficulties may not be able to follow instructions or understand the importance of moving.

Where are contractures most likely to occur?

- Hands and fingers, shoulders, knees, elbows and feet less common but can occur in the wrist, hip and spine

Why is it important to prevent contractures?

- To maintain function, such as being able to get out of bed, being able to assist with eating and drinking and to engage in activities which are enjoyable to you
- To maintain the movement in your joints
- To reduce the risk of skin damage such as pressure ulcers

What can you do to prevent contractures?

- If movement is restricted by pain ensure you have adequate pain relief
- Keep moving as able, this can be within the bed or chair such as having a stretch out, moving your feet, opening and closing your hands, raising your arms
- Ask a relative or friend to help to gently move your arms, legs, hands if your are unable to do this yourself
- Regularly change positions whilst your are in bed, talk to care staff about how they can support you
- Sit out of bed as much as you can to enable your body a change of position
- Pillows can help support to keep your body in a good position whilst in bed or sat out
- If your hand movement is effected palm protectors can help reduce the risk of hand contractures developing and assist with hygiene
- If you have a recent change in your care or care setting check that all your equipment moves with you

If you are worried or you're a family member concerned and require any additional advice or onward referral please speak to the GP

