Exercising with McArdle Disease

Top tips

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Contents

1. Benefits of exercise 2
2. The second wind 2
3. General exercise advice 2
4. Warning signs to look out for 3
5. Contact details 3
1. Benefits of exercise

- Improve aerobic conditioning (endurance)
- Improve efficiency in getting into the second wind
- Prevent muscle weakness due to inactivity
- Control weight
- Improve mood

2. The second wind

The second wind is unique to people with McArdle Disease. It is the period where exercising becomes easier after an initial period where you may experience pain and an increase in your heart rate.

The second wind takes approximately 8 – 10 minutes to achieve. During this initial period of exercise, you may experience muscle pain. It is important to monitor this pain and slow down or stop and rest if you experience pain that is moderate to strong (4 on the rate of perceived pain scale), before continuing your exercise. You may need to stop several times before getting into your second wind.

3. General exercise advice

Aerobic exercise is light to moderate physical activity that can be sustained over a period of time. This is the best type of exercise for people with McArdle Disease, as this will not lead to muscle damage if paced correctly. Examples of aerobic exercise are walking and cycling.

- Choose an aerobic activity that you enjoy.
- Start off slowly to warm up gently.
- If you experience pain that is moderate to strong (4 on the rate of perceived pain scale), slow down or stop and rest for 30 seconds until the pain starts to subside.
- When in your second wind, exercise at a moderate intensity. You should still be able to talk while exercising.
- Aim to exercise for 30 – 40 minutes, three to five times per week, but remember to build the time up slowly over several days or weeks.
- There is emerging evidence that strength training may be beneficial for people with McArdle disease. However, this should only be done under the guidance of a physiotherapist experienced in treating people with McArdle disease.
- Activities to avoid include squatting, sustained positions such as stretching (eg: yoga) and more vigorous exercise such as rushing up stairs.
4. Warning signs to look out for

- Changes in the colour of your urine (becoming darker)
- Increased feelings of fatigue or exhaustion

5. Contact details

If you have any questions about exercise, please contact:
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The Association for Glycogen Storage Disease (www.agsd.org.uk) has very useful information on exercise on its website.

UCLH cannot accept responsibility for information provided by other organisations.