



# Making household tasks easier

General advice



# Contents

The four P's of energy conservation	<b>3</b>
Dusting	<b>5</b>
Vacuuming/sweeping/ mopping floors	<b>6</b>
Making beds	<b>8</b>
Cleaning the bath/shower/ toilet	<b>9</b>
Clothes washing/drying	<b>10</b>

There is growing evidence that small increases in physical activity can help in preventing and managing certain chronic diseases and conditions<sup>1</sup>. Housework is considered a moderate intensity aerobic activity and undertaking household management tasks can help you to remain independent for longer by promoting strength and balance, and reduce the risk of falling. Household management tasks can be spread across the week to make them easier to manage. This is called energy conservation.

## The four P's of energy conservation

➔ **Priorities**

➔ **Plan**

➔ **Pace**

➔ **Posture**

## **1** **Priorities**

Sort out the most and least important tasks by asking what is important to me? Is this task necessary? Do I have to do this? Don't forget about social activities and if tasks are not important to you, don't do them or get someone else to do them (friend or family member).

## **2** **Planning**

Maintain a schedule: think about the best time to complete tasks, when do you have most energy, plan frequent rest breaks. Think about safety, correct lighting, and no loose rugs. Look after yourself and remember to ask for help from family/friends if needed. Rest before you get tired and get a good night's sleep.

## **3** **Pacing**

Take your time, don't rush. Spread activities throughout the day and have frequent short breaks. Mix periods of high activity with low activity and follow a difficult task with a less difficult task.

## **4** **Posture**

Poor posture (slouching) uses more energy, whereas good posture allows for better breathing and more comfort. Use an armchair with back support and stand upright when walking. Stand close to objects, slide objects where possible, use leg muscles instead of back muscles.

# Dusting

- Use a long-handled duster for high and low areas
- Static and microfiber dusters/cloths pick up more dust and reduce the need to wring out a cloth
- Dust only areas that can be easily reached
- Keep both feet on floor at all times
- Do not bend over for more than 30 seconds at one time
- After bending over, reverse the process using back extensions (standing up and bending gently backward)
- Use a folded towel or kneepads when kneeling
- When rising from kneeling ensure there is something stable to use as support
- It is preferable to kneel when dusting low rather than bending or squatting or use a low stool that is stable and sturdy
- Do not stand on furniture or ladders

# Vacuuming/sweeping/ mopping floors

- Think about where and how you store your equipment to minimise bending, lifting and carrying
- Only clean areas of the house that need it
- Clean one room only per day to conserve your energy
- Plan to work for less than 30 minutes at one time, at a steady rate (avoid rushing)
- Avoid doing all vacuuming/sweeping/ or mopping on the same day
- Adjust the pipe length of the vacuum so you can remain upright
- Keep your hands high on the pipe
- Wrap the hose around your back and keep your hands close to your hips so that you are pulling the vacuum cleaner with all your body

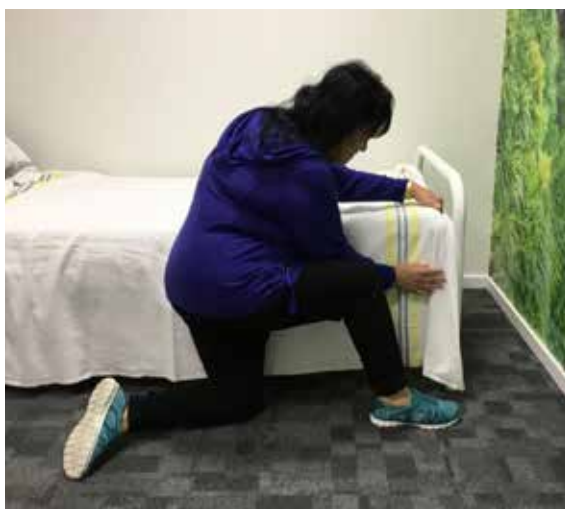


- Put your legs in a forward lunge position (picture below) in the direction of vacuuming and maintain the natural curve of the spine ('S shape')
- Walk back and forward with the hose rather than just pushing the hose while standing in the one position
- Consider purchasing lightweight appliances such as stick vacuum cleaners or consider a robotic vacuum
- Avoid excessive bending and standing with your feet together
- Consider static or micro-fibre mops: both are lighter and easier to use and can eliminate need to use a bucket
- A long-handled pan and broom will reduce the need to bend



# Making beds

- It is easier to move a bed on castors to a convenient position (use castors that can be locked)
- Use your knee to move a bed on castors out from the wall
- If the bed is not on castors, then move it out from the wall permanently
- Very low beds could be raised to allow ease of changing linen
- Position chairs at the end of the bed so blankets can be stripped off the bed by rolling onto the chair to reduce bending





- Do not lift the mattress. It is better to kneel next to the bed and slide your forearm under the mattress to tuck in the sheet. If you are unable to kneel consider using flat sheets and not tucking them in
- Make one side of the bed at a time to avoid unnecessary steps around the bed
- Only tuck in sheets and blankets at the end of the bed, consider fitted sheets and lightweight duvets
- If tucking in sides, the preferred method is to kneel, tuck, stand, move to next section of mattress, kneel, tuck, and stand until completed
- Use the bed as a support when rising from kneeling

## Cleaning bath/ shower/toilet

- Spray on cleaners need only a gentle wipe and do not create the extra resistance that cream cleansers can
- Spray the bath and tiles with a non-scrub cleaner after each use to reduce the amount of scum which builds up
- Avoid awkward postures when cleaning, use long handled products if available

# Clothes washing/ drying

- A washing basket trolley reduces the need to bend and carry
- Put the washing basket on a table or chair next to the machine if you do not have a trolley
- Wash small loads – little and often
- A front-loading machine and dryer can be raised to waist level to reduce the need for bending
- Long-handled tongs can help you remove items from a top loading machine
- A clothes dryer will reduce the need to hang out the washing
- Purchase clothes that are machine washable and require little, if any ironing
- An apron with a pocket in it is a good place to store pegs
- Place the basket on a bench, chair or trolley to load the washing from the machine



- Remove items from the machine one at a time
- Use the gentle cycle for items you would hand wash
- Use a trolley to carry washing to the clothesline
- If a trolley is not possible carry small loads to the clothesline
- Wedge the door open, before moving the basket through the door
- Clothes can be hung on a clothes rack inside to minimise carrying
- Adjust clothesline to suit height if possible
- Clothes can be hung on coat hangers if pegs are difficult to use
- Fold clothes as you remove them from the line to reduce the need for ironing

**Please contact your GP if you have difficulties managing your household independence due to health and disability concerns.**

**Disclaimer:** This information is general advice, any specific health concerns should be discussed with your GP. The author accepts no responsibility for any confusion or any misinterpretation of the information given. If you have any questions about your individual needs, please discuss with your GP.

### **Acknowledgement**

Rural and Community Occupational Therapy,  
Waikato DHB

### **Reference**

Ministry of Health. 2013. Guidelines on Physical Activity for Older People (aged 65 years and over). Wellington: Ministry of Health.