

Thoracic range of movement (ROM) exercises

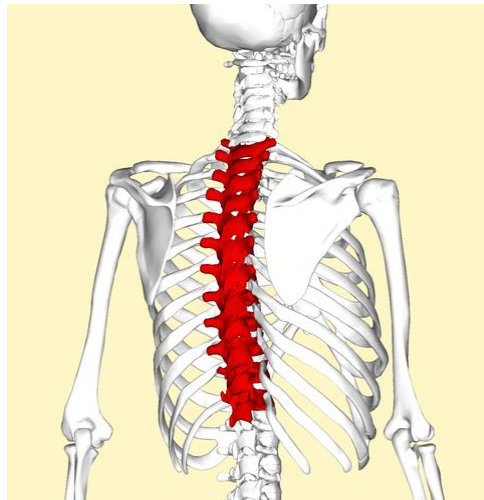
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What are thoracic range of movement (ROM) exercises?

Range of movement exercises are gentle exercises which help to maintain the flexibility and movement of your joints. This is important as it helps to prevent them from getting stiff.

The thoracic spine is the longest section of spine, with 12 vertebrae, and the only part of the spine which attaches to the rib cage.



Why are thoracic ROM exercises necessary?

When taking a deep breath your ribcage and thoracic spine move. In some conditions, particularly neuromuscular diseases, the respiratory (breathing) muscles become weak and therefore you cannot take as big a breath. Your ribcage and thoracic spine can become stiff further limiting the ability to get a good amount of air into the lungs. Other respiratory conditions can also restrict the ribcage and lung expansion. Stretching out the tissues and joints may help to preserve the range of movement.

How are thoracic ROM exercises carried out?

These exercises can be carried out in either a standing/seated position or lying down; whichever is deemed safest and most effective for you as an individual.

Seated exercises

For these exercises, you will need a chair and a walking stick, pole or broom handle.

S1) Overhead raise:

- 1) Sit in an upright position
- 2) Start by holding the stick on your lap
- 3) Aim to slowly raise the stick above your head, inhaling as you go and keeping your arms straight
- 4) Hold above your head for _____ seconds
- 5) Then exhale as you lower your arms
- 6) Repeat _____ times in one go – this is called a set.



Complete: ____ sets ____ times daily

S2) Seated twist:

- 1) Start by sitting upright in a chair
- 2) Slowly and gently twist to look over your right shoulder, inhaling as you go
- 3) As you exhale, use your left hand on the outside of your right knee to pull yourself round for a deeper stretch
- 4) Hold for _____ seconds
- 5) Return to centre, then repeat towards the other side



Complete: ____sets ____times daily

S3) Seated side flexion:

- 1) Start in a seated, upright position
- 2) Slowly and gently lean towards the right side, inhaling as you go,
- 3) As you exhale, aim to reach your right hand down towards the floor (with your left hand, hold on to the chair seat if needed to keep your balance)
- 4) Try to keep your shoulders facing forwards
- 5) Hold for _____ seconds
- 6) Return to centre, then repeat towards the other side



Complete: ____sets ____times daily

Lying down exercises

For these exercises you will need to be lying on a comfortable, flat surface e.g. a yoga mat and have a walking stick, pole or broom handle.

L1) Overhead raise:

- 1) Start by lying comfortably on your back. You may need to bend your knees slightly to be comfortable
- 2) Rest the stick on your lap
- 3) Aim to slowly and gently raise the stick above your head, inhaling as you go
- 4) Hold above your head for _____ seconds
- 5) Then exhale as you lower your arms
- 6) Repeat _____ times in one go – this is called a set.



Complete: ____ sets ____ times daily

L2) Spinal twist:

- 1) Start in a comfortable position lying on your back
- 2) Bend your knees so that your feet are flat on the mat. Inhale.
- 3) Keeping your knees together, exhale as you slowly and gently, lower your knees towards the right. Inhale.
- 4) Exhale as you reach your arms towards the left, to increase the stretch
- 5) For a deeper stretch turn your head towards the left too
- 6) Hold for _____ seconds
- 7) Return to centre, then repeat towards the other side



Complete: ____ sets ____ times daily

When should thoracic ROM exercises be used?

These exercises can be built in to your daily or weekly routine. A minimum of 3 times a week is suggested, but if you are experiencing stiffness, 2-3 times a day may be indicated.

When should thoracic ROM exercises NOT be used?

If you have new pain in your chest/back, any new changes to your sensation, or any new changes to your bladder/bowel (e.g. being unable to go or having incontinence), you should stop the exercises and seek urgent medical attention.

Are there any risks when doing thoracic ROM exercises?

Consideration needs to be given if you are osteoporotic or have any musculoskeletal issues such as a scoliosis. The technique may need to be modified or contraindicated in such cases.

Also, modifications may be given if you have weakness which impacts you being able to safely do these movements (because you may not be able to control them adequately or you may get stuck in these positions).

Specific advice for you as an individual

IMPORTANT

If you have any pre-existing injuries or health conditions, please speak to your physiotherapist.

If you experience pain during any of these exercises, stop and seek advice.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Respiratory Advanced Practice Physiotherapists at North Devon District Hospital on 01271 322577 (ext. 3785 or bleep 315)

Your local Community Health and Social Care Team:

Tel: _____ Email: _____

References

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF SPORTS MEDICINE, & Liguori, G (2021). ACSM's guidelines for exercise testing and prescription. Philadelphia, Wolters Kluwer/Lippincott Williams & Wilkins Health.

NICE guideline NG42 (2016) - MND: assessment and management

PALS

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