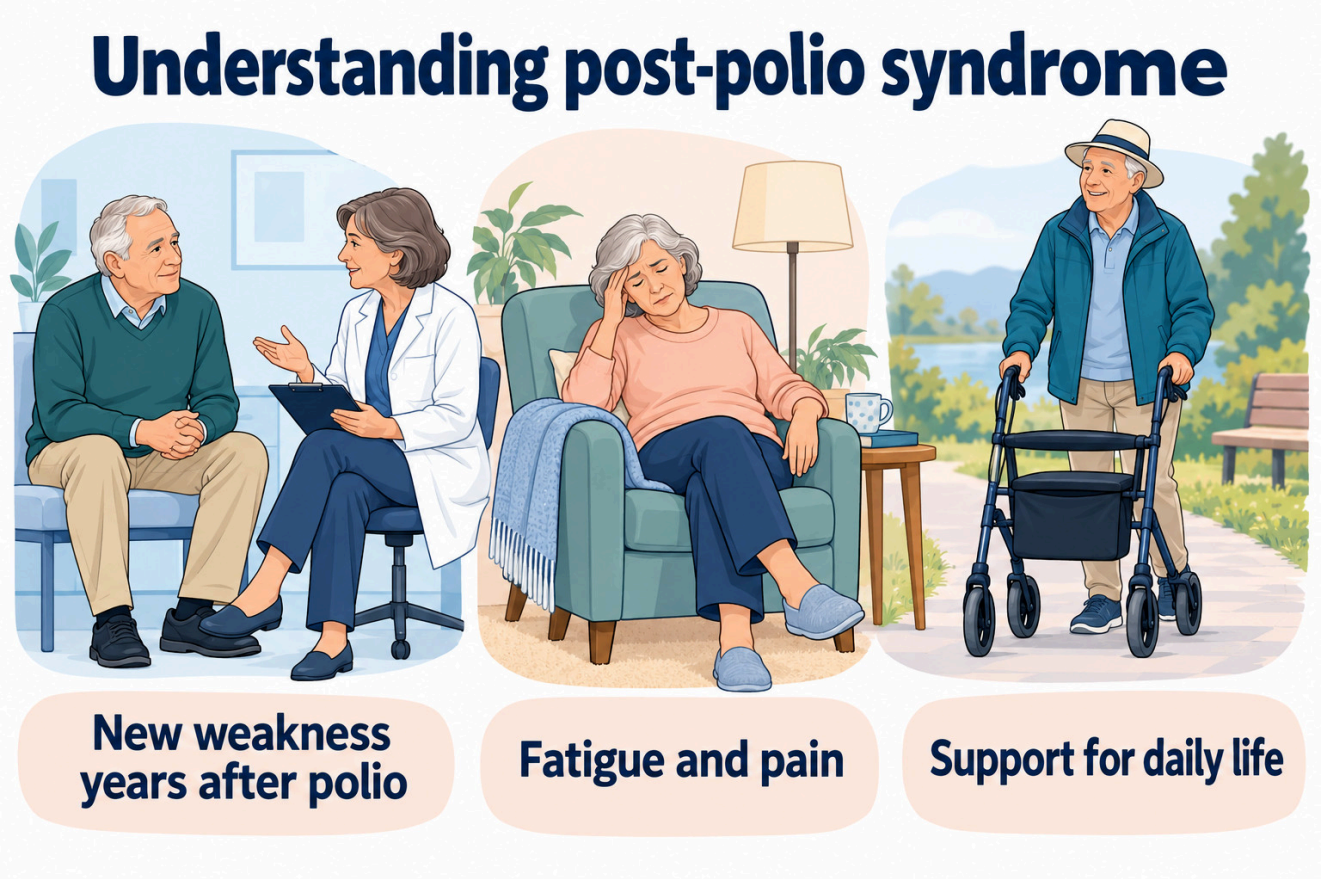
Post-Polio Syndrome

Information for adults living with PPS

Post-Polio Syndrome

A guide to symptoms, treatment and recovery



Understanding the condition

Post-polio syndrome (PPS) can develop many years after recovery from polio, commonly 15-40 years later. It causes new weakness, fatigue or pain. It is not contagious.

Living with PPS

PPS affects adult polio survivors. There is no cure, but tailored rehabilitation, pacing, rest and practical support can help manage symptoms and maintain independence.

Symptoms and assessment

Understanding the cause and when to seek help

Who can be affected?

Adults who had polio in childhood or adulthood may develop PPS years later. Symptoms vary from mild changes to substantial difficulties with mobility or daily tasks.

Common symptoms

New muscle weakness, muscle fatigue, joint or muscle pain and reduced endurance may occur. Some people feel unusually sensitive to cold. Breathing or swallowing problems can also develop.

Why symptoms develop

Surviving motor nerve cells may gradually become less able to support muscles. The exact mechanisms are not fully understood. PPS is recognised as a long-term effect of polio.

Assessment and diagnosis

The doctor reviews previous polio and new symptoms and examines muscle strength. EMG may assess nerve function; blood tests or imaging can help exclude other conditions.

When to seek medical help

Contact your doctor for rapidly worsening weakness, severe pain or joint problems, breathing or swallowing difficulties, or new symptoms interfering with daily life.

Key message

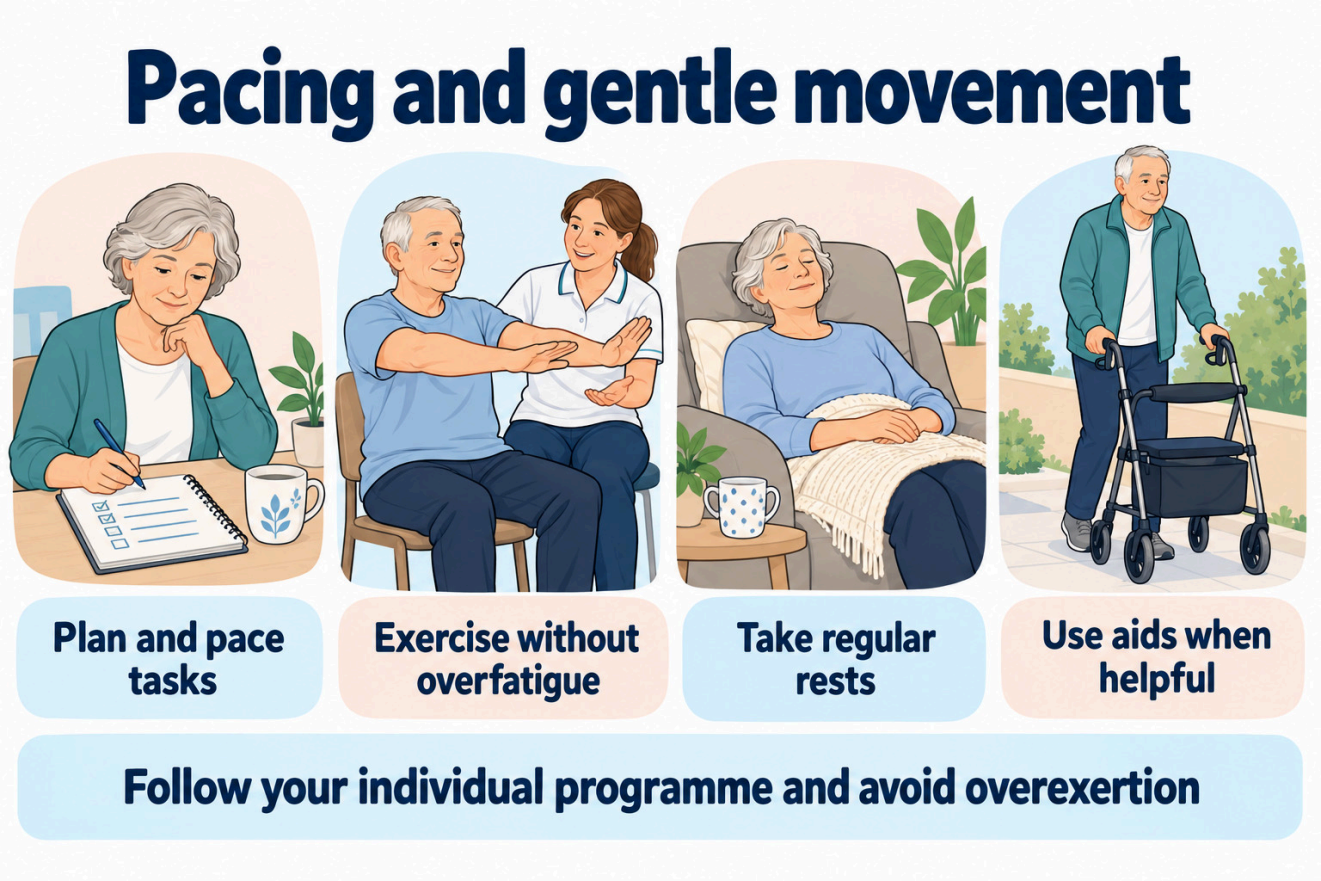
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Treatment and daily care

Activity guided by your healthcare team

Before starting activity

A physiotherapist should tailor exercise to your strength, symptoms and fatigue. Aim to maintain function without overfatiguing muscles or pushing through exhaustion.



Activity guidance

Pace: plan tasks and avoid overexertion.
Movement: follow the prescribed gentle exercise programme.
Rest: take breaks and adjust activity when symptoms increase.
Support: use recommended aids and adaptations.

Important precautions

Stop activity that causes excessive fatigue or worsening symptoms and seek advice. Contact your doctor about rapidly worsening weakness or breathing or swallowing problems.

Treatment and next steps

Managing symptoms and finding support

Rehabilitation and practical support

Physiotherapy provides tailored exercise without overfatiguing muscles. Occupational therapy can help conserve energy, adapt daily activities and maintain independence. Braces or mobility aids may be helpful.

Managing symptoms

Your clinician may advise medicines, warmth or gentle stretching for pain. Breathing difficulties need specialist assessment and may require respiratory support. Keep regular medical and physiotherapy follow-ups.

Living with PPS

Balance gentle activity, rest and good nutrition. Symptoms may fluctuate and progression is usually slow. Emotional support and support groups can help with frustration, fatigue and adjusting to changes.

Questions or concerns?

Contact your doctor for rapid worsening of weakness, severe pain or joint problems, breathing or swallowing difficulties, or new symptoms affecting everyday life. Ask for your plan to be reviewed as needs change.

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