

ALS NURSE OFFERS SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR ALS PATIENTS WHO HAVE PAIN.

1. **Practice range-of-motion exercises and stretching** — either alone or with the help of a family member or caregiver — to help prevent or relieve muscle tightness and joint stiffening, and maintain mobility. Remember to periodically raise your arms above shoulder height, as doing so can help with shoulder pain. Don't ignore your fingers, elbows, hips, wrists, ankles and toes.
2. **Don't use your muscles beyond their capability** — save them for the activities that are most important to you.
3. **Use a soft neck collar** to help support the weight of the head, and prevent neck pain and strain.
4. **Take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs** (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, to help relieve inflammation, but stay away from products containing aspirin (unless directed by a doctor) as they can cause bleeding and ulcers.
5. **Try gently rubbing or applying light pressure to fasciculations**, a type of spasm or cramp common in early-stage ALS that can be annoying, painful and keep you awake at night. (The prescription medication baclofen also is commonly recommended to treat fasciculations.)
6. **Therapy bags** filled with rice, flax seed, cracked corn or other fillers can be heated in the microwave or cooled in the freezer. They work particularly well on the back of the neck and across the tops of the shoulders, especially for people who have been sitting in front of a computer for long periods of time.
7. **Stand daily**, alone or with help, whenever you can, as it promotes circulation (particularly to the feet) and helps stretch the spine.
8. **Elevate your feet** to the same level or higher than your heart to help reduce swelling that can be caused by sitting for long periods of time in a wheelchair.
9. **Put your arms up on your wheelchair armrests**; it helps expand the ribcage and promote better breathing.
10. **Maintain proper sitting posture** by propping with pillows, blankets or other supports.
11. **Consider neuromuscular "trigger point" massage.** Trigger points are tight areas ("knots") in muscle tissue that can cause pain in the immediate area or in other parts of the body. Trigger point massage therapy is specifically designed to reduce and eliminate pain, using massage on these particular areas. Call around; some massage therapy clinics offer therapy tables that can be lowered all the way to the floor, making it easier for people with reduced mobility to transfer to the table (alone or with help) for therapeutic, pain-relieving massage. Be sure to drink a lot of water after a massage, as it helps flush out any materials broken down and released by muscles during massage, and keeps muscles hydrated.

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