



Modifying Exercises and Adjusting Your Student

MODIFYING EXERCISES

If your student is in pain or if their movement is limited in some way, you may need to modify certain exercises so that your student can do them comfortably.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

1. **Don't force it.** If the movement isn't comfortable, and you can't find a way to modify it that is comfortable for your student, just skip it. If the student is tense or in pain, the exercise will not accomplish much.
2. **If your student is in a great deal of pain, you may not want to start working with the painful area right away.** Start by working with a part of the body that is not painful; this gives your student the opportunity to feel what a pandiculation is without being uncomfortable or in pain. As they become more comfortable, you can begin gently working with the painful area. Think of it as melting a block of ice: you start from the outside and slowly work your way toward the center. Use your best judgment and work with your student to figure out what will be most beneficial for them.
3. **When modifying an exercise or finding a substitute exercise, keep in mind *why* you want to teach them this particular exercise.** What area of the body is it working with? All you need to do is find a way to get them to pandiculate this area of their body. In the following section I'll suggest specific ways to modify or substitute each exercise.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO MODIFY CERTAIN EXERCISES

*In CEI Level 3, you'll get access to the Chair Exercises course. Once you learn the chair exercises, you can use them as substitutions with people who cannot do the floor exercises. Until then, you can use these modifications to help people get more comfortable on the floor. A few seated versions are suggested.

CEI LEVEL 1

Arch & Flatten:

If lying on their back is not comfortable for your student, or if pressing their sacrum downward causes discomfort, teach them Proprioceptive Exercise 1: Seated Arch & Flatten instead.

If their neck is uncomfortable when they lie on their back, you can put a thin towel under their head. If the student has significantly kyphotic or forward head posture and they need more padding under their head, consider starting with the Seated Arch & Flatten, and then do the Arch & Curl as a next step (see modification below).

Back Lift:

If your student feels discomfort in their neck when turning their head to the side, they can keep their head straight, facing the floor. Make sure their forehead is on the floor so that the back of their neck stays long.

If your student is uncomfortable lying on their stomach, most likely due to kyphotic posture or tightness in their lower back or front of their hips, you can skip the Back Lift and come back to it in the future when their muscles are more released. You can also try using pillows under the front of the torso, and under the ankles if needed, as shown in the photos below. The student can do the Back Lift from this supported position.



Arch & Curl:

If the student has significant kyphosis or forward head posture, the neutral starting position may be uncomfortable or painful for their neck. Try putting one or several layers of folded towels, or a pillow, under their head until they are comfortable. As they release their abdominals, chest, and neck muscles, gradually reduce the thickness of the padding under their head.

If your student cannot lie down on the floor, try to get your student in a seated position in which their back is fully supported and they are slightly reclined backward. This will allow them to do the pandiculation because gravity will be acting in the right direction.

If the student cannot hold their hands behind their head comfortably, then it is best to skip this exercise for now and focus on the Arch & Flatten. If the student is able to put just one hand behind their head for support, they can practice the exercise that way. The student may try curling up with no hands behind their head, but they must be very careful to not strain their neck.

Side Curl:

If your student has shoulder or hip pain, they may not be able to lie on their painful side to do this exercise. Putting a pillow under their head may help to make their shoulder more comfortable. Also, try doing the Side Curl first lying on their non-painful side and curling up with the painful side. This will release the obliques on their painful side and make it easier to lie on that side.

If the student cannot reach their arm up over their head due to shoulder or neck pain, they can leave their hand resting on the floor in front of them. If they can comfortably curl their head up to the side without support, they can, but they must be careful. The safer modification is to leave their head down while doing the movement. Instead of lifting up their head, the student should focus on sliding the side of their rib cage down toward their hip, contracting their obliques. Then, they can release as slowly as they can back to neutral.

If they simply can't get comfortable on their side, teach them these exercises that work with their obliques:

Hip Slides

Proprioceptive Exercise #2: Standing Hip Raises

Big X (CEI Level 3)

Iliopsoas Release:

If your student's neck is uncomfortable when lying on their back, put a thin towel or pillow under their head.

If putting their hand behind their head is very painful or not possible for the student, they can practice this exercise with their head on the floor. Just be sure to instruct your student to strongly flatten their lower back down into the floor the entire time as they

lower their leg down to the floor.

If their lower back is not comfortable in this exercise or they cannot lie down on the floor, you can try doing the exercise seated in an upright chair with a flat seat:

Starting position: Have the student sit in the chair, with their knees and feet pointing straight ahead, hip width distance apart. Their thighs should be parallel to the ground or sloping downward (knees below hips), and their ankles should be under their knees or forward of their knees.

Movement: Inhale down into the lower belly, then exhale and press the lower back backward against the chair back. Feel like you are tucking your pelvis under. Keep pressing the lower back backward very strongly as you lift one leg upward. Keep pressing the lower back backward, having the sensation of tucking under, as you very slowly lower the leg down. Once your foot is on the floor, you can gently release the pressing backward of your lower back/tucking under of your pelvis. *This movement can be done keeping the knee bent or straightening it, but start with the knee bent.

Diagonal Curl:

If your student can't do this exercise because lying on their side is uncomfortable for their shoulder or hip, or because holding their hand behind their head to support it is uncomfortable, use these other exercises to work with the twisting action of the obliques:

Diagonal Arch & Curl

Washcloth

Seated Twist (CEI Level 3)

Steeple Movement (CEI Level 3)

Washcloth:

If the full Washcloth movement is not comfortable for your student due to lower back or hip pain, you should still teach them the shoulder movement, because it is so helpful in releasing and regaining control of the shoulder girdle muscles.

It is fine to just skip the lower body portion of the Washcloth if your student has back or hip pain that makes it uncomfortable. Make sure you explore other exercises that work with spine twisting and hip rotation:

Internal and External Hip Rotator Releases

Diagonal Arch & Curl
Diagonal Curl
Washcloth
Seated Twist (CEI Level 3)
Steeple Movement (CEI Level 3)

Proprioceptive Exercise 1: Seated Arch & Flatten:

If you are using this exercise as a substitute for the Arch & Flatten lying down, don't bother using the mirror at first; just focus on teaching the student how to do the Arch & Flatten correctly. Make sure they are focusing on the movement of their lower back, and make sure they are releasing very slowly and getting the sensation of a pandiculation.

If it is not possible for your student to sit upright without back support, they can sit all the way back in an upright chair with a flat seat and straight back. If this is still not comfortable for your student, find a way to make them comfortable in some sort of seated or reclined backward position. The most important thing is to teach them how to do the arching and flattening movements correctly; get them engaging and releasing their lower back and abdominals so that they can become more mobile.

Proprioceptive Exercise 2: Standing Hip Raises:

If your student is not able to stand up unassisted, it is fine for them to do this exercise while supporting themselves (with a walker, putting their hand on a wall, etc).

If your student is not able to stand up, they can do this exercise seated in an upright chair with a flat seat. They may want to put one or both hands on the arms of their chair to provide light support and balance; but the focus still needs to be on engaging the obliques to lift up each hip, and very slowly releasing the obliques to lower each hip down.

CEI LEVEL 2

One-sided Arch & Curl:

If your student is unable to lift up one leg and hold their knee, they can do this exercise keeping both feet on the floor. They can simply bring one hand up behind their head and gently shift their weight into the hip of the leg that should be up. They should focus on rolling that hip forward, arching that side of the lower back, and then flattening or curling using that side of the abdominals.

If putting their hand behind their head is painful or not possible for the student, then they can practice this exercise as the “One-sided Arch & Flatten.” As they Arch and Flatten, they should very gently shift their weight into the hip of the leg that has the knee bent up. This allows the student to get the benefit of the exercise. As they Arch, they should feel their weight more in that hip and their lower back muscles contracting on that side. As they Flatten, they should feel their abdominal muscles contracting on that side.

Diagonal Arch & Curl:

Same modification as the One-sided Arch & Curl; this can be done with both feet on the floor, with weight gently shifted into the hip of the leg that should be up.

If putting their hand behind their head is painful or not possible for the student, then they can practice this exercise as the “Diagonal Arch & Flatten.” As they Arch and Flatten, they should very gently shift their weight into the hip of the leg that has the knee bent up. This allows the student to get the benefit of the exercise. As they Arch, they should feel their weight more in that hip and their lower back muscles contracting on that side. As they Flatten, they should feel their abdominal muscles contracting on that side.

Hip Slides:

If your student cannot lie on their back comfortably, teach them other exercises that work with the obliques in the same way (below). If they can lie on their back but sliding one hip up aggravates their sacroiliac joints or their hips, then skip this movement, and try to use the exercises listed below instead.

Side Curl

Proprioceptive Exercise #2: Standing Hip Raises (which can also be done seated)
Hip Directions (CEI Level 3)

Hip Raises:

If this movement is uncomfortable for your student, then focus on doing the One-sided Arch & Curl.

Hip Circles:

If your student cannot lie on their back comfortably, teach them the Hip Directions instead (CEI Level 3).

If your student can lie on their back but this movement causes pain, then focus on doing these other exercises if possible:

Side Curl

Iliopsoas Release

Hip Slides

Hip Raises

Proprioceptive Exercise #2: Standing Hip Raises

Big X (CEI Level 3)

Hip Directions (CEI Level 3)

Lower Back Release:

If your student cannot keep their knees straight when lifting them up above their hips, it is not a big deal at all; many people can't. Your student can keep their knees bent as much as needed and still get benefit from the exercise if they are moving slowly enough. If the student's hamstrings are extremely tight to the point that they can't keep their legs up even with their knees bent, focus on doing the following exercises:

Hamstring Release

Standing Hamstring Release (CEI Level 3)

Seated Hamstring Release (CEI Level 3)

Your student can also do this exercise with one leg at a time. They should keep one foot on the floor, with that knee bent, in the normal neutral starting position. Then they can lift up the other leg, straighten it as much as they can comfortably, and lower it toward their head at the same speed as instructed in the video.

If the above modifications do not allow the student to do the movement comfortably, skip it for now. Focus on other movements that release the lower back, gluteals, and hamstrings: Arch & Flatten, Back Lift, External Hip Rotator Release, Hamstring Release, Gluteal Release.

Standing Calf Release:

If your student cannot stand up, teach them the Foot Exercises (CEI Level 3). If they are able to lie down, teach them the Hamstring Release to release the backs of their legs.

Hamstring Release:

If your student cannot lie on their stomach, teach them the Standing Hamstring Release and the Seated Hamstring Release (both in CEI Level 3). If they can't lie on their stomach due to kyphosis or lower back or hip pain, be sure to address these issues with other exercises so that lying on their stomach eventually becomes possible. Also, try putting pillows under their torso as suggested in the Back Lift modification and see if that allows them to do the Hamstring Release comfortably.

Scapula Scoops:

If your student cannot do Scapula Scoops Part 1 lying on their back, teach them the simple shoulder raising and lowering pandiculation from the Bonus Video "Ultimate Pandiculation." (CEI Level 1) They can do that exercise sitting or standing. The Scapula Scoops can also be practiced sitting upright in a chair.

If the student can't put their hands behind their head comfortably, they can put their hands on their belly and let their elbows rest on the floor, or rest their arms and hands by their side on the floor, and practice the scapula movements as instructed.

If they are able to lie on their sides more comfortably, you can teach them Shoulder Directions (CEI Level 3). Shoulder Directions can also be practiced sitting upright in a chair.

Quadriceps Releases:

If your student cannot do Quadriceps Release Version 1, teach them Version 2.

If your student cannot do Version 1, make sure you are teaching them how to release their hip flexors with the Iliopsoas Release and the Internal Hip Rotator Release; this may make Version 1 more comfortable in time.

Flowering Arch & Curl:

If your student cannot lie on their back to do this exercise, or if it is simply uncomfortable or painful, just skip it. Focus on the Arch & Flatten, Arch & Curl (and its variations), the Internal and External Hip Rotator Releases, and Scapula Scoops Part 2.

Proprioceptive Exercise 3: Standing Bending Side to Side:

If your student cannot stand to do this exercise, it can be practiced sitting down. The student should sit in an upright chair with a flat seat, and they should not lean against the back. Their knees and feet should be pointing straight ahead, about hip width distance apart. Their thighs should be parallel to the floor or sloping downward, and their ankles should be under their knees or forward of their knees.

Proprioceptive Exercise 4: Rib Cage Shifts:

If your student cannot stand to do this exercise, it can be practiced sitting down (same starting position as above).

CEI LEVEL 3

Pelvic Clock:

If your student is unable to lie down to do this exercise, simply skip it. Be sure to teach them the Seated Arch & Flatten.

Big X:

This can be practiced lying on the back or lying on the stomach. If your student cannot lie down, they can do the upper body part of the Big X while sitting or standing.

Inversion & Eversion:

This is an advanced exercise, and for some people it causes or aggravates hip pain. If this exercise is not comfortable for your student, be sure that they are practicing the Internal & External Hip Rotator Releases on a regular basis. You can feel free to skip this exercise altogether, or offer your student this seated modification:

Have your student sit on the floor with their legs stretched out in front of them. They should sit on a surface that allows their feet to slide easily. They should lean back a little bit and put their hands on the floor to support them. Then, instruct the exercise just as you would if they were lying down. They should allow their hips to lift off the floor just as they would in the lying-down version.

Shoulder Directions:

If your student cannot lie on their side to do this exercise, have them lie on their back and do the Scapula Scoops and the upper body part of the Flowering Arch & Curl.

If your student cannot lie down, they can do the Shoulder Directions sitting upright in a chair.

Hip Directions:

If your student cannot lie on their side to do this exercise, be sure to teach them these exercises instead:

Side Curl

Hip Slides, Raises, & Circles

One-sided Arch & Curl

If your student cannot lie down at all, teach them the seated version of Proprioceptive Exercise 2.

Head Lifts:

If your student cannot lie down, and if they have forward head posture and you really want to teach them this exercise, start by teaching them the Seated Arch & Flatten in order to release their tight core muscles and get their pelvis and lower back properly aligned.

Then, while sitting upright in their neutral starting position, instruct them to slowly press their head forward. Then, instruct them to release their head back to neutral as slowly as they possibly can. This is the seated version of the Head Lifts.

Head & Knee Lifts:

If lying on their stomach is uncomfortable for your student, try using pillows underneath their torso as shown in the Back Lift modification. If that doesn't work, simply skip this exercise.

Steeple Movement:

If your student cannot do this movement for some reason, just skip it and focus on other exercises that work with the twisting movement of the obliques:

Diagonal Arch & Curl
Diagonal Curl
Washcloth
Seated Twist (CEI Level 3)

Standing Hamstring Release:

If your student cannot stand to do this exercise, they can do a version of it seated in a chair with a flat seat. Have them sit at the front of the seat, with their knees and feet pointed straight ahead, about hip width distance apart. Their feet should be in front of their knees. They can very slowly bend forward, hinging at their hips. If they are able to, they can do the same progressive lifting and releasing/lowering pattern as done in the Standing Hamstring Release.

Seated Hamstring Release:

If this movement is not comfortable or possible for your student, focus instead on these exercises and their modifications:

Lower Back Release
Hamstring Release
Standing Hamstring Release

Seated Twist:

If your student cannot sit comfortably in the starting position for this movement, they can do it seated in an upright chair with a flat seat. In addition, be sure to teach them the Internal and External Hip Rotator Releases and the Washcloth, so that this exercise becomes more comfortable in time.

Shoulder, Elbow, and Wrist Releases:

If your student cannot lie down, these shoulder releases can be substituted with seated versions of Scapula Scoops and Shoulder Directions. The elbow and wrist releases can be done from a seated position.

Foot Exercises:

These can be practiced in any position that is comfortable for your student. If they are unable to lift their feet up or reach their feet in any way, they can just flex and point their feet and toes and release extremely slowly, without using their hands for assistance. They should also be sure to practice the Standing Calf Release and Shin Release.

Shin Release:

If your student cannot lie on the floor, they can practice this exercise seated in an upright chair. They should begin by sitting at the front of the seat and sliding their feet forward, 12-24 inches in front of their knees, and then performing the movement.

Face & Jaw Exercises:

These can be practiced in any position that is comfortable for your student.

Breathing:

These can be practiced either lying on the back with the knees bent, or sitting up in any position that is comfortable for your student.

ADJUSTING YOUR STUDENT

In general, teaching the self-care exercises should be as hands-off as possible. It is best to guide your student using your words so that they can experience the exercise completely on their own.

If your student is really not understanding your description of the position they are supposed to be in, you can either demonstrate the correct position or gently adjust them. If you need to move a part of their body, let them know in advance what you'll be doing, and then be as gentle and supportive as possible. After making the adjustment, be sure to ask them if their new position is comfortable.

If your student is having trouble sensing certain muscles, ask them to put their hand (if possible, depending on the exercise) on that part of their body. Bringing the sensation of touch to an area typically makes it much easier to sense the muscles that are working. Have your student keep their hand on that area as they do the exercise so that they can feel the muscles contracting and releasing. If they are not able to comfortably touch the area, you can lightly touch the area (let them know in advance).