

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

for Adults with Spinal Cord Injury



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PREAMBLE

These guidelines are appropriate for all healthy adults with chronic spinal cord injury, traumatic or non-traumatic, including tetraplegia and paraplegia, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity or socio-economic status. Adults are encouraged to participate in a variety of physical activities that are enjoyable and safe.

Adults can meet these guidelines through sports, transportation, recreation, occupational demands or planned exercise, in the context of family, work, volunteer, and community activities. The guidelines should be achieved above and beyond the incidental physical activity accumulated in the course of structured rehabilitation or daily living.

Following these physical activity guidelines can lead to improved cardiovascular and muscular fitness. The potential benefits far exceed the potential risks associated with physical activity. These guidelines may be appropriate for those with an acute spinal cord injury, who are pregnant, have an active infection, are susceptible to autonomic dysreflexia, or have a chronic medical condition beyond a spinal cord injury; however, they should consult with a health professional to understand the types and amounts of physical activity appropriate for them.

For those who are physically inactive, doing amounts below the recommended levels may bring some fitness benefits. For these adults, it is appropriate to start with smaller amounts of physical activity and gradually increase duration, frequency, and intensity as a progression towards meeting the guidelines.

For important fitness benefits, adults with a spinal cord injury should engage in:

At least 20 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic activity 2 times per week,
AND

Strength training exercises 2 times per week, consisting of 3 sets of 8-10 repetitions of each exercise for each major muscle group.

| How...? | Aerobic Activity | Strength Training Activity |
|-------------------|--|---|
| How often? | Two times per week | Two times per week |
| How much? | Gradually increase your activity so that you are doing at least 20 minutes of aerobic activity during each workout session. | Repetitions are the number of times you lift and lower a weight. Try to do 8-10 repetitions of each exercise. This counts as 1 set. Gradually work up to doing 3 sets of 8-10 repetitions of each exercise. |
| How hard? | These activities should be performed at a moderate to vigorous intensity. Moderate intensity: activities that feel somewhat hard, but you can keep doing them for a while without getting tired. Vigorous intensity: activities that make you feel like you are working really hard, almost at your maximum, and you cannot do these activities for very long without getting tired. | Pick a resistance (free weights, cable pulleys, bands, etc.) heavy enough that you can barely, but safely, finish 8-10 repetitions of the last set. Be sure to rest for 1-2 minutes between each set and exercise. |
| How to? | There are many ways to reach this goal, including: <i>Upper Body Exercises:</i> wheeling, arm cycling, sports <i>Lower Body Exercises:</i> Body weight supported treadmill walking, cycling <i>Whole Body Exercise:</i> recumbent stepper, water exercise | There are many ways to reach this goal, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Free weights ■ Elastic resistance bands ■ Cable pulleys ■ Weight machines ■ Functional electrical stimulation |