

SPINAL INJURIES UNIT

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Physical Activity



Why is physical activity so important?

People with spinal cord injury tend to have a less physically active lifestyle than people who are able bodied. Also we all become less active as we get older which doesn't help the situation. Physical activity is very important to all of us at every stage in life.

Benefits of physical activity include:

- Healthier heart and lungs
- Improves your fitness
- Improves your strength and flexibility
- Helps maintain weight
- Improves your confidence
- Improves your energy levels
- Is a good way to make social contact
- You feel better due to chemical changes that occur in your body

Remember, if you are just starting out with physical activity, check with your doctor

What physical activity can you do?

- It is important that **you** choose your physical activity and that it is something you enjoy. Otherwise you probably won't continue
- Often people with spinal cord injuries find just getting ready for the day takes all their energy. You can often find ways to lessen the time and energy on this so that you can do the things you enjoy
- Choose an activity that doesn't cause pain or strain – pushing your wheelchair for long distances as exercise may actually cause repeated strain on your arms. [Click here for information on Your Arms and the Future](#)
- Studies report that 30 minutes for 5 days a week is certainly a good starting point
- Include activities that use both your strength and endurance
- **Remember** to do a few minutes warm up first then another few minutes cool down at the end. This could be by gentle shoulder and arm movements without any resistance

There are lots of different activities you can choose from, including:

- Swimming or water activities
- Sports such as tennis, bowling or archery
- Hand cycling outdoors or an arm ergometer (cycle) at home
- Going to a gym or doing exercises at home
- Playing with the family or the dog
- Interactive computer games – try golf or tennis
- Gardening or housework



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Hints to help you succeed!

Starting physical activity is hard for us all. Think about some of these tips that may help

- It has to be fun and enjoyable, find something you like doing
- You have to be able to fit it into your routine
- Do the activity with others – family or friends
- Find people who can support and encourage you and give you positive feedback
- Set yourself some small goals and congratulate yourself on achieving them
- Seeing the benefits is always a good motivator
- If you are having problems starting, ask yourself what are some of the barriers stopping me? It could be transport, the cost or the environment. Look for help if you need it. [Click here for information on It's all about Change](#)

Eating well!

- What you eat and how much you eat is important. Here are some general points about good nutrition but it may be worthwhile seeing a dietician to look at your own situation. [Click here for information on Your health - Keep it in Check](#)
- Your calorie input should balance with your energy output
- Try not to eat foods that are high in calories such as fried foods
- Foods that are low in saturated and trans fats; and high in grains, fruit and vegetables are best
- Give yourself time for shopping and preparing your meals

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