

Physical activity can make you...

FIT
FOR
LIFE!



Look better, feel better, become more independent!



“I’m in a wheelchair. It’s too difficult to play sports.”

“I can’t think of a physical activity that I would enjoy.”



“Sports equipment and health clubs are for able-bodied people.”



“Why should I bother to exercise? It won’t help me.”

“I don’t have the time and energy to take care of myself and exercise.”



Sound familiar? Maybe you think that you can’t enjoy sports or other forms of physical activity either. But, you couldn’t be more wrong!



Photographs by Stanley Blanchard

Physical activity can be a part of everyone's life... regardless of your physical limitations! You don't have to be an athlete. The key is to keep your body moving! Start out by keeping it simple — do regular stretching exercises... housework... raised-bed gardening... play catch with kids... or swim. Keeping active means you will feel physically, emotionally and socially healthy! Here's how you can get started:

- 1. Choose a physical activity that you can enjoy, and that you'll stick with. This booklet contains a wide range of possibilities.**
- 2. Be sure that the activity is sustained (15 to 20 minutes per session), and regular (at least three times per week).**
- 3. See your doctor before starting any physical activity program.**
- 4. Start slowly, and increase the amount or duration of activity gradually.**
- 5. Join with others (friends, family, co-workers) to get, and give support.**
- 6. Keep a record of your activity (distances, number of times per week, etc.) so you can measure your progress.**





I can't imagine my life without physical activity! It's a great equalizer! I'm healthier and my body responds better to problems presented by my disability."

— Donna Ponessa

Tailor Activities to Fit Your Needs and Abilities!

Just about any form of physical activity, even sports, can be tailored to meet your needs and abilities. Increasing numbers of exercise programs, sports and sporting equipment are being designed or adapted for people





with disabilities. More health clubs are becoming accessible, and organizations such as independent living centers can provide information about accessibility and advocacy.

But, you don't have to join a club or buy expensive equipment. There are many activities that you can do on your own, and that are low-cost, if not totally free.

Physical Fitness = Better Health!

Staying fit is especially important for people with disabilities, many of whom live sedentary lifestyles. When you're physically active, you're less likely to develop additional health problems, like heart disease, high blood pressure, osteoporosis or arthritis; to gain excess weight; or become depressed. Physical activity can be good for your body:

- ▶ It energizes, and increases stamina and strength.
- ▶ It enhances mobility.
- ▶ It helps prevent pressure sores.
- ▶ It may reduce spasticity.
- ▶ It may strengthen bones.
- ▶ It helps control weight by burning extra calories.
- ▶ It improves both appetite and digestion.
- ▶ It tones and strengthens muscles.
- ▶ It keeps joints, tendons and ligaments flexible for easy, unrestricted movement.
- ▶ It improves heart and lung functions.
- ▶ It strengthens the heart and improves circulation.
- ▶ It improves blood pressure readings and glucose levels.
- ▶ It helps balance and agility.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS ALSO GOOD FOR YOUR MIND:

- ▶ It improves self-image and self-confidence.
- ▶ It stimulates self-reliance.
- ▶ It relaxes, and relieves stress and tension.
- ▶ It improves intellectual alertness and concentration skills.
- ▶ It fosters an overall feeling of health and well-being.
- ▶ It results in a sense of accomplishment, and new skills.
- ▶ It increases your chances of meeting new people.

*Physical activity can ultimately increase your **INDEPENDENCE**, and give you more energy to enjoy life!* It is fun. It can be done almost anywhere, by anyone (alone or in a group), and is not expensive (unless you want it to be).



Photo courtesy of Dot Nary



“Maintaining an exercise routine seems to be easier if you’re a disabled ‘jock’. I’m more of a ‘couch potato’ and I’m not inclined to view exercise as fun. But my disability demands that I find some activity that I

can enjoy and stick to it. Wheelchair aerobics at home work for me; aquatic exercise is also good but demands more planning. As more adaptive equipment becomes available, I’m sure that I’ll find more ways to keep fit.”

— Dot Nary

Certain Activities Improve Certain Functions.

Besides being enjoyable and healthful, certain activities contribute to specific physical improvements.

Ball games, such as seated volleyball, wheelchair softball, and “beep” baseball for the blind and visually impaired, can help tone or improve upper body strength. Adapted cross-country skiing and aquatics are good for synchronizing arm-leg movements, overall toning and improved circulation. Even miniature golf can help, by improving grasping and releasing skills, and hand-eye coordination.



“Sports have always been a part of my life. After my injury, I thought that part of my life was over. Then I started playing (chair) tennis, and recently joined a basketball team. I’m again enjoying the feeling of competition — winning and losing, but always trying my hardest. I have

made many friends during tournaments, and have traveled to many wonderful places. Most importantly, I have regained a sense of myself as a competent, capable person.”

— Eric Emerick

1996 US OPEN QUAD OPEN SINGLES CHAMPION

It’s Your Choice!

Team sports or individual physical activities? Join a club, or work independently? It’s your choice! To find out about the options and opportunities that are available in your community, call local community centers, the YMCA/YWCA, an Independent Living Center, or health clubs. Or, you can create a work-out or exercise corner right in your own home.

Remember, special equipment can be purchased to adapt activities to your needs, whether it’s a flotation device for water aerobics or special gardening tools. But, again, no one says you have spend a lot of money to become physically fit!



Here are some activities for you to consider. Those for which adaptive equipment is available are starred (*):

SPORTS

wheelchair basketball,
tennis, football
and softball*
seated volleyball*
“beep” baseball*

curling*
bowling*
martial arts
shooting
table tennis*

weightlifting
wrestling
golf*
hockey*
archery

OTHER PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

passive standing*
walking
hiking*
cycling*
horseback riding*
orienteering (map reading
& survival skills)

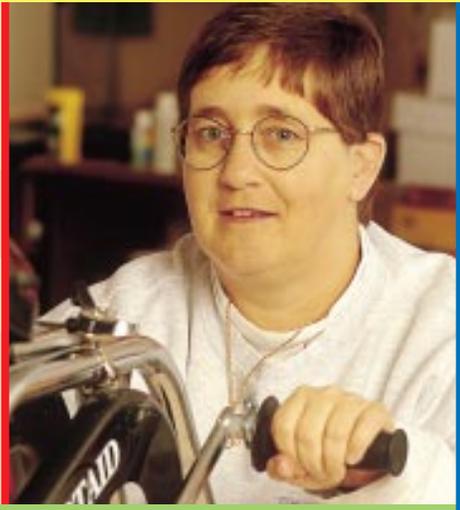
racing
running and jogging
rowing
scuba diving*
waterskiing*
ice skating*
cross-country and
downhill skiing*

dancing
aerobics and seat
aerobics
jumping events
gardening
sailing



Make It Even More Enjoyable...

Is there a friend or family member you'd like to have join you? A “buddy” system works well for many activities. With a partner, you'll have companionship as well as shared encouragement and accomplishments.



“There is much enjoyment and benefit to getting back into physical activity or sport. The rules may vary, you may need special equipment, but it’s worth it! I have three boys and getting back into sports gives us something to do and enjoy together, as a family. It shows my sons that being in a chair doesn’t

make you disabled. They get around on foot; I get around on wheels.”

— Sandy Koon

Play Safely.

Remember, physical activity is not a substitute for any prescribed physical or occupational therapy. It may improve your performance in therapy, but cannot replace the therapy itself. Also, before starting any physical activity, talk to your doctor to make sure that it’s the right one for you. And, make sure to follow the safety guidelines for the sport or leisure activity you choose (i.e., wearing a bicycle helmet, strapping yourself to exercise equipment for additional support, and other safety measures).

Once you decide on a physical fitness activity, let your physical therapist know about your choice. She or he can share ways in which you can benefit the most from your efforts.

Kids Need Physical Activity, Too.



Many children of all abilities just don't get enough exercise. Yet, all kids need to be active. They need something that will help improve endurance, balance and coordination. Besides the physical and mental benefits, physical activity, especially team sports, can help kids learn social skills, to share and to take turns. So, if you have a child with, or without a disability, encourage physical activity. And, join them. That way, everybody benefits.

For more information...

Contact local health or fitness programs in your area, your Independent Living Center, health care provider or physical therapist for more ideas or the location of appropriate programs near you, as well as specialty catalogs for adaptive equipment.

For sports programs and activities, contact:

- New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, or local parks and recreation departments;
- YMCAs and YWCAs;
- ASPIRE of the Capital District (Adaptive Sports Programs Involving Recreation and Education), 123 Saratoga Road, P.O. Box 121, Glenville, New York 12302; Mid-Hudson ASPIRE, Denise Milazzo, Home Route 1, Box 114, Greenwood Lake, New York 10925; and ASPIRE of New York City, 50 Maple Place, Manhasset, New York 11030; and
- Wilderness Inquiry, 1313 Fifth St., S.E., Box 84, Minneapolis, MN 55414-1546.



For children's activities, contact WOW (Winners on Wheels) by calling 1-800-WOW-TALK, or write 2842 North Business Park Avenue, Fresno, California 93727-1328.



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