



Accent on Active Living



Youth Ambassadors Across Canada

Active Living Alliance
for Canadians with
a Disability

The Youth Ambassador Advocacy Kit is designed to enable young Canadians to become more active—both physically and as advocates for change in their communities.

Book 1, *Accent on Active Living*, focuses on what we mean by *active living*. It tells you what this approach to life involves, and how you can benefit from learning more about it.

Book 2, *Advocacy in Action*, shows how you can contribute to your goal of an active lifestyle by learning how to change or remove the barriers to active living that might keep you from realizing your dreams.

Book 3, *Taking the Path: Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope*, helps you plan your life and reach your goals. Although this process is designed to help you become an advocate for active living, you can also use it to help you plan your career, your education, and the rest of your life's goals.

Book 4, *An Advocate's Agenda*, is your personal advocacy manual. It is designed to help you track the people you contact, the activities you pursue, and the results you achieve as you move through your active life.

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This Youth Ambassador Advocacy Kit has been developed as part of the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability's Youth Ambassador Program (www.youthambassadors.ca). The Active Living Alliance is a national network of organizations and individuals dedicated to promoting full community participation through active, healthy living. For more information, please visit www.ala.ca or call us toll free: 1-800-771-0663 (TTY 1-888-771-0663).

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Introduction

Welcome to ***Accent on Active Living***, the first booklet of a four-booklet series, the *Youth Ambassador Advocacy Kit*. This kit has been developed to enable young people with disabilities to pursue “active living”.

While active living is an approach to life that every Canadian should follow, it is particularly important that young people with disabilities learn about it and make it a part of their lives as early as possible. That’s because building an active lifestyle into your life now—when you are young—will help you to avoid the many health problems that come up later in life for people who have been inactive.



“Active living”: a goal everyone can shoot for!

“My name is Preston and I am 14...I live on a mixed farm outside Saskatoon. I attend grade 9. I use a laptop and Braille for all my school-work...it has speech software and reads for me. Some sports that I enjoy are skiing, rock climbing, weight lifting, swimming, trampolining and many other things. I am in drama and band at my school and I take bass guitar lessons. I enjoy volunteering and helping others. I am a motivational speaker for the CNIB. I also teach blind or visually impaired people to use certain programs and the Internet.”

Alliance Youth Exchange Participant

Preston lives life to the fullest: he’s an excellent example of active living—the healthy, physically active lifestyle that today’s magazines, newspapers and television broadcasts promote endlessly to Canadians of all ages and all abilities.

You’ve seen those ads; you’ve heard those messages:

- “Get out there and be active!”
- “Exercise!”
- “Eat healthy foods!”
- “Take part in your community’s activities!”

“Active living is more than just physical fitness or exercise. It means making physical activity a part of daily living, whether it’s gardening or taking the dog for a walk...Active living encourages everyone, not just people who are young and fit, to get up and get moving.”

Healthy Living with a Disability or Chronic Illness
Muscular Dystrophy Canada and Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability



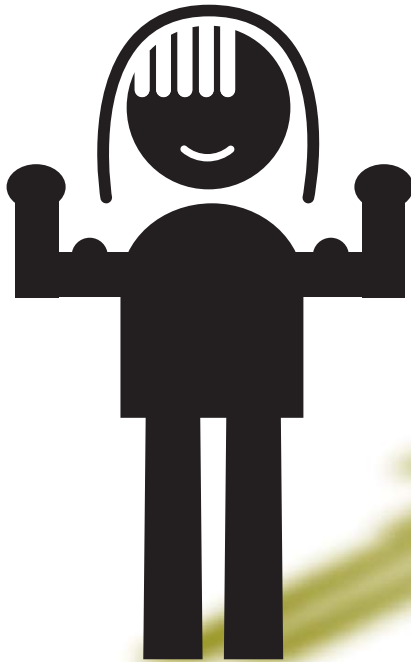
“Studies have demonstrated that even very modest amounts of daily activity (e.g., walking at a “light” pace for 60 minutes a day or brisk walking for 30 minutes per day) result in substantial benefits.”

Health Canada and Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, 2000

Some of you may think these messages are meant only for people without disabilities. Surprise! They are just as important—in fact, even more important—for those of us who have disabilities.

And that’s why the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability (ALA) has developed this Active Living Kit. We’ve been working with young Canadians since 1987—and we’ve seen how a little know-how, a little information, and a will to take action can change the way they live their lives.

To find out how, read on!



It's a fact that may surprise you: disability and wellness can go together

Research has proven that the more physical activity we take part in, the more our stamina increases and the less stress we feel. The result? We feel happier and more in control. Even school performance usually improves.

Check out the evidence

- **Active lifestyles build resilience:** “Resilience” is one of the key factors in helping people cope with their everyday crises and challenges. Studies show that an active lifestyle can make not just your body, but your mind and spirit, more resilient.
- **“Lean and Mean” is good:** Everyone needs to move to keep their heart pumping, their lungs breathing and their food moving in the right direction. People with disabilities are no exception: by boosting their activity levels, their bodies can serve them better.
- **Activity creates energy:** Physically active young people usually have more energy and strength than those who are inactive. Better yet—people who become more active are often surprised to find that they are having more fun!
- **Energy builds self-confidence:** Increased energy helps you take on more challenges. You feel more self-confident and independent, and that new self-confidence enables you to make your own choices about the lifestyle you want to lead!

“...Active living emphasizes people's ability to do activities that benefit their health in ways that are unique to their interests and abilities.”

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Even more perks for you!

Here's how being active will help you manage life's ups and downs:

Stress relief

We all know that growing up can present some “interesting” challenges, such as:

- Negotiating the social and academic hurdles as you move from elementary, to middle, to high school and college or university;
- Coping with a physically changing body—teamed with roller-coaster emotions;
- Dealing with those ever-changing relationships—with your friends, your parents, your relatives;
- Dating and planning your future.

So it's good to learn that young people who are physically active report less stress and depression than their inactive counterparts.

Pain relief

Physical activity will help you build strength and flexibility, and improve circulation and posture. You'll find it easier to get around, have fewer aches and pains, reduce swelling and improve blood circulation in your legs. New research shows that any type of physical activity will help you feel better if you are living with chronic pain.



More friends

Bowling, line dancing, hang gliding, rock climbing, weight lifting, intramural sports, hiking—and even walking to school—are all ways to keep fit. Better yet, they all provide many opportunities to meet people, develop relationships and make new friends. That keeps you from becoming isolated—a sure road to depression. Get out there, get active, and get connected.

In short, the improved self-confidence that comes with being active, combined with the increased stamina and strength, leads to a more independent **you**. And that feeling of independence will give you the confidence to make your own lifestyle choices—yourself!

“From the active living perspective, walking or wheeling is just as valued as running, and carrying groceries or doing household chores contributes to health in a manner similar to traditional strengthening exercises.”

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How the experts describe active living

People—all people—who want to be healthy need to be active. Scientists tell us that we need a minimum of 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity every day to get and stay healthy.

Active living means *building physical activity into your daily life*. It's easy to do if you keep your eye on making small changes. You'll need to build in three types of activity to keep your body healthy:

- 1. Endurance activities:** “Endurance” means “lasting a long time.” Endurance activities include wheeling, walking, swimming, organized sport or recreation programs, and even chores like yard work. These types of activities strengthen your heart, lungs and circulatory system. They also give you more energy.
- 2. Flexibility activities:** These include gentle reaching, bending and stretching of all your muscles. You can do yoga or just take part in activities like gardening, bowling and even vacuuming.
- 3. Strength activities:** These are the activities that make your muscles work against some kind of resistance. They help your muscles and bones become strong, improve your posture and prevent bone loss. You can lift weights or try activities like climbing.

“It is not necessary to do all of the exercise in one bout. The health benefits can be obtained whether you do one walk for 60 minutes, or six walks for ten minutes each.”

Health Canada and the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, 2002

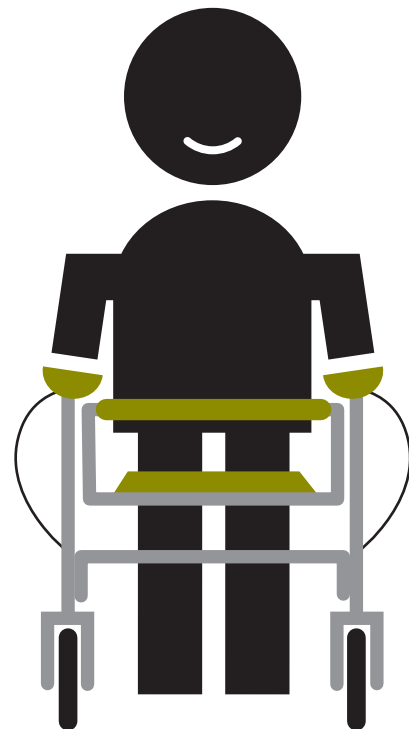


“Active living” isn’t only exercise— there’s more to it than that!

In the early years of fitness research, the experts used to say that we needed to exercise briskly enough to make our hearts pump at 60-90% of our maximum heart rate, three to four times a week, for 30 minutes at a time. For some of us, that sounded impossible!

Now, we have learned that less strenuous exercise can have major benefits too. Even better, we learned that we can all actively improve our health in other ways, including eating more wisely to match our lifestyle, being aware of our bodies’ special quirks, and making sure we get the right medical care.

Furthermore, the newest research suggests that the benefits of active living are particularly important for people who have disabilities. Certain kinds of exercise can help build up muscle groups to avoid a number of related problems. In fact, there are so many possible benefits, that we can’t include them all in this little handbook—although you can check out a few of them on the next page.



Benefits that can result when “active living” is part of your everyday lifestyle

- Increased strength and improved ability to move about
- Fewer injuries from activities that place special stress on certain muscles (for example, transferring your weight between uneven surfaces, such as steps and a floor)
- Increased stamina and flexibility for carrying out household chores, bringing home groceries, and so on
- Relief from the aches and pains that come from remaining in one position for long periods
- Increased capacity to perform the activities of daily living
- Improved blood circulation that reduces swelling in your legs or arms
- Improved blood pressure
- Improved self-image and self-confidence
- Less depression and anxiety



How active are you?

Here is a list to get you started on thinking about how active you are now. Check off the activities you already do, and add others.

- I walk (or wheel) to class at least three times a week.
- I play a sport at least once a week that gets my heart going.
- I lift weights, either at home or at a gym.
- I often help my family with yard work such as raking leaves or pulling weeds.
- I clean my room myself—including vacuuming and wiping things down.
- I swim at least twice a week.
- I go hiking or out to play catch with my parents, my brothers and sisters or my friends.
- I help with the grocery shopping.
- I carry my books around school by myself.
- I make sure that I get regular medical check-ups.
- I eat a healthy, balanced diet at least five days a week.
- I attend sports and social events at school and in my community.



Six years ago, Sarah (who uses a wheelchair), flew to Brock University for the Youth Exchange's first year. Rope-climbing tall trees gave her an adrenalin rush she had never felt before. The experience showed her just what she was capable of and inspired her to promote active living for youth in her own community. "The Exchange showed me I can do these things, and fight to get into gym classes." Sarah hasn't looked back since!

Breaking down the barriers to active living

OK—you're inspired too! You can't wait to try some of those activities. Congratulations!

But wait! What if your community isn't ready for an active you?

- What if your school or your community centre keeps sending you to the "special" gym class? Or worse, the library?
- What if your summer camp isn't set up for rock climbing?
- What if your ice rink manager says that being on the ice is too risky?
- What if the manager at your local store thinks you can't handle a shift at the cash register?



Don't worry: you can break down barriers like that—by becoming your own advocate!

In fact, that's perhaps the best part about active living: It empowers you to learn how to be an advocate—not only for yourself, but for others too.

It isn't hard to learn to be an advocate. Many young people like you have done it. In fact, many report that being an advocate gives them an adrenalin rush! (Rope-climbing isn't the only way to get one.)

We can help you get started—that's what Book Two in this kit is all about.

So take a break: go for a spin, get yourself a cool drink. Then come back and pick up Book Two. Read how you too can become an advocate, just like rope climber and advocate Sarah. We'll show you the ropes!

