

Helping Canadians with Disability/Chronic Disease Get Physically Active: Tip Sheets for Intermediaries

For Canadians with a disability, regular physical activity may be even more important than it is for the rest of the population. For a person with a disability, an active lifestyle can open doors to increased health, social inclusion and self-empowerment - doors which might otherwise remain closed. Access to physical activity can eliminate the likelihood of acquiring secondary health conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure or heart disease. Being active builds resiliency and can provide an all-important outlet for a person with a disability.

These tip sheets are designed to provide general information in support of Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines, developed by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology.

ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY (ABI) /TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI)

General Information

Facts and Figures

- ABI / TBI is one of the leading causes of disability in children and young adults.
- Each year, thousands of Canadians incur an ABI with the majority being young adults.

What is ABI/TBI?

An ABI is caused by trauma or a blow to the head. It occurs most commonly as a result of motor vehicle accidents, a fall, consequence of an assault/violence, or through a sport injury. An ABI usually causes permanent damage to the brain and results in impaired functioning.

A person with an ABI may present with a combination of the following issues.

Spasticity - some people with ABI have abnormal muscle tone, and quite often, high muscle tone (i.e. spasticity). Spasticity is very debilitating and can severely restrict the person's range of motion and ability to take part in daily activities.

People who have experienced an ABI may face feelings of frustration and failure because they are not able to function as they did prior to their injury.

Impact of ABI/TBI

A person's abilities may change a great deal following an ABI. These changes can be pronounced or mild.

Common issues faced may include:

- cognitive (problems with memory, initiation, concentration, organization, and comprehension);
- motor (difficulty moving and using certain parts of the body);
- behavioural (depression, irritability, inability to sit still)
- difficulties with communication.

Working with a person who has ABI / TBI

Tips for Getting Active

People with an ABI may have difficulty remembering things. They may not remember your name, or what they are suppose to be doing. It is important to understand that often this behaviour is not intentional.

People with ABI may have a hard time performing tasks that may appear simple to others (i.e. making a sandwich). Remember, they may have motor difficulties (i.e. difficulties controlling their body) and/or difficulties remembering or sequencing the steps to certain tasks.

People with ABI are aware of things they could do in the past, but which they may have difficulty with now. Try to understand how frustrating this might be for them.

There is a difference between ABI and a learning disability. Someone with an ABI has experienced trauma, their abilities have changed, and they need help to readjust their life post-injury.

When working with a person who has an ABI, consider the following:

- Involve the person in physical activity goal setting - make sure goals are realistic. It may be helpful to provide some options for goals that they can choose from;
- Educate about the importance of physical activity to the individual and their family;
- Know the individual's strengths and limitations - remember that everyone will have different limitations as a result of an ABI;
- Be patient. Listen to the person and encourage them to communicate their needs to you - they are the experts at what they need, not you!
- Lack of initiation can be a major difficulty for a person living with the effects of ABI.

Provide positive encouragement and support at all times.

Teaching and Communication Technique

The following are ideas for ensuring maximum participation for people with an ABI, depending on their abilities. You can use these strategies in combination:

- Memory - write instructions down, and provide visual cues. If the participant asks a question, provide the answer. Letting the person guess the wrong answer several times will reinforce wrong information.
- Comprehension - break down the activity into steps and keep instructions very simple. Use repetition and make sure to link verbal instructions with visual demonstrations.
- Inattention - minimize distractions during the activity, and try to keep things consistent.
- Limited concentration - provide frequent breaks and opportunity for rest.
- Physical limitations and fatigue - modify aspects of the activity to match with the person's physical abilities to promote success (i.e. lighter equipment, change size of activity area).
- Spasticity - Avoid activities that will increase spasticity in the muscles (i.e. quick jerky movements and jumping), encourage intermittent relaxation and stretching.

- Emotional - encourage success and mastery during physical activity in order to limit frustration.
- Social behaviour - use smaller groups and reinforce socially appropriate behaviour. Encourage others to be patient and helpful. Provide a structured environment and set limits.

Physical Activity Tips and Modifications

- Recovery from ABI is unpredictable and changes frequently, so make sure you are always aware of the person's present strengths and weaknesses;
- Concentrate on the person's abilities in order to promote success and confidence;
- Keep it simple - especially for people who have challenges with memory and concentration. For example, decrease the number of steps in an activity and limit distractions.

Resources

What is Brain Injury - <https://braininjurycanada.ca/acquired-brain-injury/>

Brain Injury - <http://braininjury.com>

Ontario Brain Injury Association - <http://www.obia.on.ca>

Brain Injury Association of Canada - <http://biac-aclc.ca/>

National Consortium for Physical Education and Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities (1995). Adapted Physical Education National Standards. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Lieberman, L.J. and Houston-Wilson, C. (2002). Strategies for Inclusion; A Handbook for Physical Educators. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

*This project would not have been possible without the expertise of our partners. ALACD would like to sincerely thank these organizations for working with us to develop this resource: the **Ontario Blind Sports Association, Variety Village, the National Network for Mental Health, and the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada.***

Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability

© 2013