



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.

AMPUTATIONS

General Information

Facts and Figures

- An estimated 227,000 Canadians have an amputation of a limb or extremity;
- An amputation may be congenital. Other causes may include trauma, illness such as diabetes, or infection;
- Injuries which prevent an individual from using a part of their body are the leading cause of amputation;
- Individuals with an amputation may undergo rehabilitation and may use prosthetic devices.

What is an Amputation?

Amputations can occur through a congenital condition, or they may take place through a traumatic injury to an individual's limbs (hand(s), arm(s), foot/feet or leg(s)). An amputation may be minor, involving fingers or toes or a small part of a hand or foot. A major amputation can involve the removal of all or part of the hand or foot, a leg, or an arm.

Amputations are often carried out through a surgical procedure, by which all or part of a limb or extremity is removed. Today these procedures are highly specialized and as technology progresses, prosthetics continue to advance. While amputation can be a complicated medical process impacting millions of people worldwide, this does not prevent many people from pursuing a healthy and active lifestyle. Research shows that exercise not only improves overall health and reduces the impact of secondary conditions among individuals with an amputation such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and obesity, but it enhances their quality of life through heightening their ability to perform everyday activities.

Impact of Amputation

For each person, the impact of amputation will vary depending on whether the amputation was congenital vs. acquired, the type, and the circumstances through which it was sustained. Physical activity can go a long way towards enhancing the health and outlook of a person who has undergone an amputation. These individuals have more to lose from being sedentary.

Some of the common factors associated with an amputation, which exercise can help to alleviate include:

- A negative emotional response due to losing a body part;
- Risk of weight gain or poor health which could make the individual more susceptible to contracting secondary health conditions;
- Re-establishment of body awareness and adapting to the loss of function following an amputation;
- Dealing with chronic pain, such as the sensation of pain which some individuals experience even after an amputation – this is referred to as Phantom Pain;
- Altered sense of body image;
- Risk of depression or other psychological problems.

Working with a Person who has undergone an Amputation

Tips for getting Active

The benefits that an individual who has undergone an amputation can gain from physical activity will largely depend on their starting point, and the degree of effort which they are willing to put into an exercise program. The choice of physical activity should be matched with the individual's needs and their abilities. The individual will move and participate in their own way. The types of equipment which may assist a person with an amputation to participate in physical activity may include a manual, sport or power wheelchair, a cane, crutches, walker, brace, orthotics, or prosthetics.

Each and every individual should have the opportunity to get actively involved in community programs, fitness and health initiatives. The role of physical activity providers in creating a welcoming and safe environment to accommodate a person with an amputation can not be understated.

When working with an individual who has an amputation, consider the following:

- Create a welcoming environment – customer service focus;
- Ask the individual what their needs and interests are – never assume;
- Reminder: privacy/disclosure policies ensure individuals share information at their discretion and comfort;
- Focus on what the individual can do rather than what they cannot;
- Think safety first;
- Encourage the individual to consult with a medical professional prior to starting a physical activity program;

- An individual's impaired mobility could have been the result of an accident, injury or progressive condition – be patient and supportive;
- Consult with resource agencies with expertise in areas of inclusive physical activity – training or professional development materials may be beneficial;
- Ensure staff and volunteers receive adequate training to be able to deliver quality customer service, gain equipment knowledge/use and learn about available resources – on/off-site.

Teaching and Communication Technique

- Offer assistance and support as required or when asked;
- Reminder – do not touch an individual or their assistive device or service animal without their consent;
- Create space for easy movement and participation;
- Match the individual with activities which meet their needs and abilities. Some individuals may be able to train or race competitively on the track while for others, a slow walk may be enough;
- Make it fun – having fun and socializing are important benefits to physical activity experienced by people who are active;
- Develop activities at the level of the individual, focusing on aerobic training of 4 to 7 times a week for 30 to 60 minutes, general weight training of 2-3 days per week focusing on repetitions of 8 lifts, and flexibility performed at the end of each workout to help maintain range of motion;
- When leading activities outdoors, ensure participants wear sun screen, protective clothing, sunglasses and a hat;
- Make it interesting – exercise and every day activities, such as gardening or walking a dog, can easily go together.

Physical Activity Tips and Modifications

- Ask the individual to consult a medical practitioner prior to involvement;
- Provide a facility without barriers to participation, thus creating access to the venue, equipment or activity (this could include: accessible parking spaces, ramp access or flat access to the front door, remove obstacles in hallways – signage, garbage/recycling bins, automatic or wide frame doorways to enter/exit)
- Allocate additional staff or volunteers to the area where the participant will be taking part in an activity, where possible;
- Ask first, do not assume that the individual needs or would like help;
- Avoid slippery surfaces and raised obstructions;
- If available, provide adapted equipment;
- As with every individual, other considerations should be discussed (i.e. pain, fatigue and the individual's expectations).

Resources

Canadian Amputee Sports Association - www.canadianamputeesports.ca

Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability – www.ala.ca

Variety Village – www.varietylvillage.ca

Statistics by Country for Amputation – www.RightDiagnosis.com

NHS Choices: Amputation - Complications -
www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Amputation/Pages/Complications.aspx

Exercise Tips for Trainers working with Amputees -
<http://www.ncpad.org/827/4217/Ex~Rx~Tips~for~Trainers~Working~with~Amputees>

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Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability

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