



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.

BLINDNESS / VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

GENERAL INFORMATION

Facts and Figures

- 816,250 (3.2%) of Canadians aged 15 plus report having a seeing limitation.
- Approximately 75% of a person's sensory information is learned through sight.
- Less than 3% of Canadians with a disability regularly participate in sport. Just 1% of those living with a visual impairment participate in sport.
- Canadians with a visual impairment are far more likely to suffer from clinical depression compared to those with sight.

What is Blindness / Visual Impairment?

Blindness is the condition of lacking visual perception. There are varying degrees of blindness, from having zero % of visual perception, to having a slightly higher percentage. An individual with zero % light perception is considered blind. However, an individual with a small percentage of vision may still lack vision and this cannot be significantly improved using standard visual aids. Individuals can either be born with a visual disability (congenital) or can acquire one later in life (acquired). Typically, it takes more time to teach a new skill to someone who has a congenital disability rather than someone who acquires a disability later in life. Again, this will vary depending on the individual.

Impact of Blindness / Visual Impairment

- A person who is blind or has a visual impairment can feel uncomfortable and anxious in unfamiliar settings.
- Miscommunication can occur when working with someone with a visual disability, given that they may not automatically understand instructions.
- The majority of sensory information is learned through sight. This varies among individuals, based on whether the disability is congenital or acquired.
- Social isolation may occur among persons who are blind or visually impaired.
- A cane, specialized glasses or seeing-eye dog may often be used.

Working with a Person Who is Blind / Visually Impaired

Tips for Getting Active

Being physically active and exercising is beneficial for individuals of all abilities in a variety of ways including socially, physically, physiologically, and psychologically. Ensuring everyone, including those with a visual disability, can have the opportunity to effectively engage in physical activity is essential to their personal development.

Creating a barrier free environment to enable those who are blind or visually impaired to benefit from physical activity is definitely attainable.

Teaching and Communication Techniques

- When beginning an activity, make sure to introduce someone with a visual disability to their surroundings.
- A person with a congenital visual disability may adapt to new environments more comfortably than someone who acquired their disability.
- Use appropriate, clear verbal instructions.
- Use your hands to guide the movement of the person who is blind as needed.
- If any equipment moves during activity, make sure to inform the participants.
- Always ask if the individual needs help, don't just assume it.
- Identify yourself when speaking to the person, encourage others to do likewise
- Be creative for inclusive play.

Physical Activity Tips and Modifications

- Athletics
 - In running, guide runners and the athlete with a visual disability each hold an end of a tether. The guide runner directs the pair around the track.
 - In jumping events such as long jump, a 1 meter take off area is added.
- Combative Sports (Judo and Wrestling)
 - There are very few modifications made to these sports, other than the athletes always beginning the competition touching rather than separated. In fact, most competitions are completely integrated with sighted athletes.
- Goalball
 - Goalball is a sport specifically designed for athletes with visual disabilities. It is also one of the only team sport options for these athletes.



How to Adapt Equipment

- Use balls with bells in them to make it easier to locate and track.
- Use a sound device on stationary equipment for easier navigation.
- Use objects with different textures and weights to distinguish them.
- Increase the size of targets, bases, and nets to locate them more easily.
- For those with a visual impairment, use equipment with colours that contradict the activity area. Make sure to ask the individual their preferences.

How to Adapt Rules

- Make the playing area either larger or smaller to accommodate.
 - IE, Blind soccer is played on a much smaller surface than a regular pitch.
- Put blind folds on sighted participants.
 - IE, Goalball requires all participants to wear a blind fold.
- Add additional referees and aids during play.

RESOURCES:

<http://www.afb.org/section.aspx?FolderID=2&SectionID=7&TopicID=116&DocumentID=2887>

http://www.ehow.com/about_5185162_challenges-being-blind.html

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-628-x/2009013/fs-fi/fs-fi-eng.htm>

<https://nfb.org//images/nfb/publications/fr/fr31/3/fr310304.htm>

<http://playingtheblindcard.blogspot.ca/2012/01/born-blind-vs-becoming-blind.html>

*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