



Active fun for everyone



**Improving activity in children and
young people with physical disabilities**



Being active is important for everyone. Regular activity throughout our lives will help us keep as healthy as possible for longer. To get the most benefit, it's vital to get into the habit of being active early on in life. It can sometimes need a bit more thought and effort to enable children and young people with disabilities to be physically active – this doesn't mean they can't take part in fun activities and sports.

Why be active?

- **It's fun!**

- Increases fitness, flexibility, mobility and independence

- Develops balance and coordination

- Maintains healthy weight

- Reduces risk of long-term illnesses like obesity, diabetes, poor bone health and high blood pressure

- Encourages teamwork and making new friends

- Improves mental health, confidence, self-esteem and ability to cope with difficult situations

- Leads to better sleep

- Aids concentration and learning

- Helps to cope with pain

- Establishes a lifelong active lifestyle



How much?

If your child isn't very active at the moment, start off gently.

- Aim to be active every day.
- Even 10 minutes at a time of extra activity will have benefits.
- Build up gradually to **at least 60 minutes** of activity a day.



The activity should be enough to make your child breathe faster and feel warmer. That doesn't have to mean going to a gym, exercise class or sports club - many types of play can be active enough to have fitness benefits.

Some children with conditions such as cerebral palsy may find it difficult to achieve 60 minutes of activity. They will still benefit from:

- breaking up the amount of time spent sitting, lying down or immobile.
- using a standing frame or walker if they have difficulty walking.

Involve the whole family!

Getting the whole family more active shows children how important physical activity is. Activities like walks, bike rides, treasure/scavenger hunts, ball games and swimming can all be done as a group.



What sort of activity?

Physical activity is any movement which works our muscles and uses energy. Different types of activity can benefit our health and fitness in different ways, so it's a good idea to include a variety.

Aerobic fitness refers to how well the heart and lungs work without us getting tired or out of breath.

- Any activity that makes your child breathe harder will improve their aerobic fitness.
- Remind them to stop if they get too tired.
- Try walking, running, cycling or swimming.



Flexibility is a measure of how well our joints move.

- Better flexibility can improve the way the body moves and helps protect against injury.
- Stretching before and after being active is important, especially if your child tends to have stiff muscles.
- Try yoga, t'ai chi or gymnastics.



Strength is the amount of force our muscles can exert.

- Strong muscles help with moving around, and also with posture and comfort.
- Your child should include activities that strengthen bones and muscles three times a week.
- Try activities that use the child's own bodyweight, such as Pilates or resistance bands.



Remove

this middle section from the staples and display as a reminder for activity ideas!



Why be active?



It's fun!



Leads to better sleep



Increases fitness, flexibility, mobility and independence



Improves mental health, confidence and self-esteem



Aids concentration and learning



Develops balance and coordination



Reduces risk of long-term illnesses



Helps to cope with pain



Maintains healthy weight



Encourages teamwork and making new friends



Establishes a lifelong active lifestyle

Start small and build up gradually: something is better than nothing

Sit less, Move more!

All activities should make you breathe faster and feel warmer



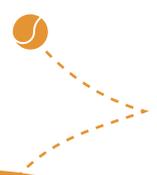
1, 2, 3, 4...



Play



Run/Walk



Tennis



Basketball



Swim



Horse riding



Cycling



Gymnastics



Boccia



Table tennis



Archery



Athletics

Include muscle and bone strengthening activities 3 times per week



Reduce screen time

Involve the whole family!
Getting the whole family more active shows young people how important physical activity is.





Photograph courtesy of Disability Sport NI.

What stops your child being active?

The most important thing is to find an activity that's fun for your child. A quick internet search can help you find clubs in your area.

"We don't know what opportunities are out there"

- Disability Sport NI (www.dsni.co.uk) can provide a list of groups based on your child's interests and particular disability.
- The Sports Development Team in your local council can also provide information on activities near you, including what's available at your local Disability Sports hub.

Almost any sport can be adapted if your child needs it to enable them to take part, so pick one they enjoy. Some popular sports like football, tennis, basketball, bowls, hurling and rugby already have adapted versions for children who use wheelchairs, frames or other disability aids. Your child might also like to try:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| • boccia | • athletics |
| • table tennis | • gymnastics |
| • archery | • outdoor sports like sailing and cycling |

Your child's school, health centre and therapists may be aware of even more local opportunities, so get in touch with them.



Tiredness can be a part of some medical conditions causing physical disability.

- Remember that being physically active can give your child more energy and help them to sleep better.
- Try to fit in activity during parts of the day when they are less tired.

“They’re too tired to be active”

The most important thing is for your child to have fun!

- Explore the different opportunities available and encourage them to choose activities they’d like to try.
- Give them a sense of feeling good about being active by linking it with something they already find rewarding – offer praise, extra time with a parent or sibling, or more of their favourite activity afterwards.

“They’ve never been interested in sport”

Your child’s disability may make being active very difficult. Even with limited mobility, their health and fitness can still benefit.

- Break up the amount of time spent sitting or lying.
- Encourage them to use a standing frame or sit unsupported where possible.
- Children who spend a lot of time in a chair can improve fitness and upper limb strength through chair based activities.
- Some gyms now have upper body and lower body ergometers or active/passive bikes that could be used by teenagers.

“It’s just too difficult”

Playing with others: advice for parents and teachers

All children can take part in fun leisure activities with appropriate support, although some will need adapted accessible facilities and supervision to be able to join in safely and enjoy the activity.

Small changes to sports and games can easily be made to avoid children with physical disabilities being excluded. The STEPS approach can help you to work out how to adapt activities by changing the Space, Task, Equipment, People and Speed. You can find more information on the STEPS approach here: www.ukcoaching.org/sites/default/files/Quick-Guide-to-Inclusive-Coaching.pdf

Some ideas include:

- including extra bounces of the ball in games like tennis or table tennis
- using substitute runners in games like rounders, or reducing the distance between bases
- reducing the size of the court or playing area, or using zones (for example in hockey, basketball or football)
- using a larger or lighter ball, depending on the game and individuals involved
- playing games on smooth surfaces rather than uneven ground.

It is important not to change a game so much that it no longer resembles the original game being played. Asking children themselves what changes might be helpful is always a good idea. Any changes made to a game do not need to be permanent – it may be possible to phase them out over time as fitness and skills increase.



Fuel for fitness

A healthy diet is a very important part of being fit and healthy! Try to maintain a balanced diet for the whole family, with plenty of vegetables, fruit, lean protein, healthy fats, and calcium and vitamin D for strong bones. For more information on healthy eating, visit www.choosetolivebetter.com



Safety first

- If your child hasn't previously been very active, start slowly and build up gradually.
- If you're not sure whether a particular activity is safe for your child, discuss it with their doctor or therapist before starting.
- Avoid overdoing it - don't push your child too hard.
- Encourage them to stretch before being active.
- Make sure they know to stop if they feel pain or discomfort.



Public Health Agency

12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).
www.publichealth.hscni.net

Find us on:



www.activelivingnolimits.co.uk