

Home Physical Activity Programs for People with Physical Disabilities Tips AND Resources for Your Home Activity Program

by Dot Nary



OK, maybe physical fitness isn't your MAIN goal in life, but ...for you to reach other important goals, such as maintaining your ability to live independently, working, or parenting, physical fitness can increase stamina and strength.

Many people, with and without disabilities, prefer to exercise in the convenience and privacy of their own homes. Here are information and strategies to help you start and maintain an in-home, customized fitness program.

√ **Seek others with disabilities who share your interest.** Ask your local center for independent living, YMCA, city recreation program, senior center, or organizations addressing specific disabilities. Anyone who has addressed barriers to physical activity for themselves or others might have information about activity at home.

√ **Check with someone about safe activities** tailored to your abilities. If your primary physician can't help, check with others, such as rehabilitation physicians, physical or occupational therapists, personal trainers or recreation therapists. Your local center might know where to refer you. Current emphasis on physical activity for *everyone* makes it more likely that you will find a knowledgeable local person to consult.

√ **Read up on it.** Disability publications such as *New Mobility* and *Paraplegia News* often feature articles on physical activity, and many web sites, both mainstream and disability-related, provide information to help you get started. (See the resource list at the end of this brochure.)

√ **Choose activities you think you'll like.** If aerobic exercise is the goal, a videotape or audiotape that focuses on people with disabilities might be the answer. For increased strength, hand weights, books, or even water bottles can be used. For stretching and flexibility, a seated yoga program, learned from a book or videotape, can help. And remember, if you choose something that doesn't work, choose again—this is YOUR program!

√ **Set a goal,** and go for it. If you are inactive now, setting a goal of 10 minutes of activity three times a week might be more achievable than 30 minutes per day. The idea is to start small, and build on it, but do START! If you miss a session, don't give up—just

start again as soon as you can. If you have a formalized care plan with a case manager, such as through an HCBS program, try to make your physical activity goal part of that plan.

√ **Locate resources.** Can you borrow exercise videotapes from your local library or center for independent living? Will your health insurance cover some sessions with a physical therapist? Could the cost of hand weights and a book on strengthening be worked into your care plan? Be creative, and expect service programs to support your health improvement efforts.

√ **Schedule your physical activity on your weekly calendar,** as you would any other important event. One of the benefits of a home program is that you can make your own schedule, such as doing aerobics at 11 PM if that works for you.

√ **Become aware of your triggers and barriers.** A trigger is something that prompts your activity, such as setting up a schedule or exercising to your favorite music. A barrier is something that prevents activity, such as failure to set goals or not setting time aside. Figure out what works for you, and stick with it.

√ **Record your progress.** Keep a record of your activity in a private journal, in a chart on your refrigerator door, or on a calendar next to the TV. A visual record of your progress can help you keep going. Also record any changes noted, such as “can wheel out to mailbox and back without tiring” or “increased flexibility to put my own shirt on.”

√ **Reward yourself.** If you set a goal and achieve it (such as exercising 3 times weekly for a month), be sure to reward yourself. A bunch of flowers, a visit to the park on a nice day, or a new pair of sweat pants might be just what you need to encourage you to keep up the good work!

√ **Find a buddy or two.** Identify others around you who will support your health improvement efforts. An encouraging personal care attendant, or a roommate who works out with you, will help you focus on your activity goals. Even a friend you can call or email to report your progress can help!

Many people try different types of home fitness activities before finding the activity that works for them. Each time you try to increase activity, your chances of succeeding get better. While it can be difficult to change everyday habits—*it is possible and you can do it!*

Resources

Websites

- www.ncpad.org – Maintained by the National Center on Physical Activity and Disability and provides a wealth of information on physical activity and disability, including home-based exercise modules. Can also be reached at (800) 900-8086.

- www.collagevideo.com – Specializes in fitness videos, with a section of adaptive videos. Free paper catalog also available by calling (800) 433-6769.
- <http://justmove.org/home.cfm> – Maintained by the American Heart Association and provides an online exercise diary and a virtual personal trainer.

Books

- Exercise for People with Disabilities: Getting started on your Fitness Plan. Froehlich, K., et al. (2001). Research and Training center on Independent Living (RTCIL), University of Kansas. 785-864-4095. www.rtcil.org. Contains ideas for activities, motivational strategies, and model activity logs.
- American College of Sports Medicine' s *Exercise Management for Persons with Chronic Diseases and Disabilities*. Moore, G. (Ed.) (2001). Human Kinetics, 800-747-4457. www.hkusa.com. Good resource to review with a therapist or trainer to devise an adaptive program.
- *Conditioning with Physical Disabilities*. Lockette, K.F., and Keyes, A.M. (1994). Human Kinetics, 800-747-4457. www.hkusa.com. Lots of photos, covers strengthening for people with a variety of physical disabilities.

Magazines

- New Mobility. (888) 850-0344. www.newmobility.com. Monthly publication focused on "life on wheels." Frequently features articles on adaptive recreation and physical activity.
- Paraplegia News and Sports 'n Spokes. (888) 888-2201. <http://www.pn-magazine.com>. Both magazines published by Paralyzed Veterans of American frequently address health issues of wheelchair users. Website features a searchable On Line Article Library.

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Information about ordering a two-color brochure containing this information is available in our paper catalog (available by contacting the RTC/IL at the address below) and our catalog at <http://www.rtcil.org>.

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