

FACTSHEET



This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form.

Be active adolescents and adults

Physical activity

Physical activity is important for everyone, and especially for people living with Spina Bifida. Physical activity will help to:

- Improve fitness, balance and coordination.
- Maintain and develop flexibility
- Increase muscle strength and improve posture
- Help achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- Improve mood, help with relaxation and reduce stress
- Help with constipation
- Provide opportunities for friendships, independence and improved self-esteem.

Many people living with Spina Bifida will use a wheelchair for sport or physical activity, even if they do not use a wheelchair for day-to-day mobility.

Fitness and injury prevention

Doing any physical activity is better than doing none. If you currently do no physical activity, start by doing some and build up day by day to the recommended amount. This is called pacing – it will help you successfully achieve daily physical activity and avoid injury and pain from doing too much too soon. Consult a health professional if unsure. Be active on most, preferably all, days every week

Guidelines for accumulated weekly activity include:

- 2 ½ to 5 hours of moderate intensity physical activity or
- 1 ¼ to 2 ½ hours of vigorous activity every week.
- A combination of moderate and vigorous physical activities is OK each week also.

Moderate intensity activities require some effort. Examples include walking or pushing a wheelchair independently, swimming, housework, walking the dog.

Vigorous activities make you breathe harder or puff and pant. Examples include competitive wheelchair sport such as tennis, basketball or wheelchair racing or a gym-based program like “Burn Rubber Burn.”

A 5-10 minute warm up will help prepare the body for the activity. The warm up should include stretching activities, some continuous movement for 2-3 minutes e.g. Arm/upper body movements; and movements/games related to the activity.

A 10 minute cool down should also follow the activity. This will remove waste products from the muscles so that they don't become sore and stiff. The cool down should consist of some movement for 2-3 minutes e.g. slower chair pushing/running and stretching the muscles that were used in the activity.

The fitter you are, the more you will enjoy being active and will also be less likely to suffer from injury.

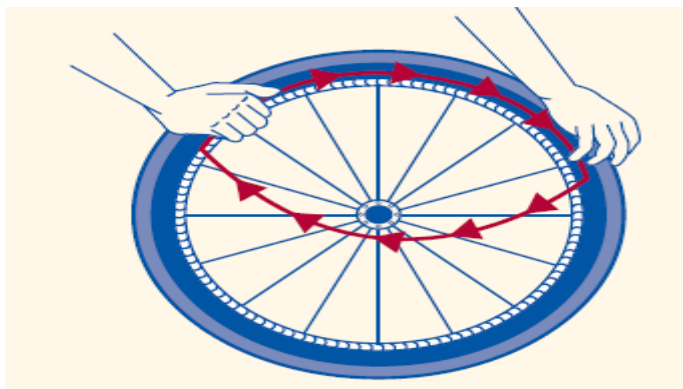
Building strong upper body limbs

Physical activity can help to build strong bodies. People living with Spina Bifida need strong arm and upper back muscles to help with:

- Balance
- To move or transfer from their wheelchair
- To walk using equipment
- To propel their wheelchair.

Include muscle strengthening exercises on at least 2 days each week as part of your physical activity routine. Some suggestions for improving fitness include:

- Sports such as basketball and tennis
- Walking the dog
- Swimming
- Using a bike with hand pedals- your OT/ Physio can assist with adaptations.
- Gym programs such as “Burn Rubber Burn.”
- Modified yoga or body balance
- Personal training
- Canoeing, paddling or kayaking
- Pushing in the wheelchair over a distance, using long arm movements (speak to your therapist about the best way to move the wheels of the wheelchair).



The most energy efficient way to push your wheelchair is using a semi-circular propulsion technique. This is pictured above.

- Use long smooth strokes to decrease the amount of times you need to push.
- Take regular rest breaks and rest following fatigue to let your arms recover.
- Maintain your wheelchair regularly to reduce rolling resistance from clogged castors and stored grime.
- **If** using pneumatic tyres they should be maintained at high pressure to make pushing easier.

A semi-circular push stroke is where your hand falls below the push rim between push strokes. (Reproduced by kind permission of Paraquad NSW)

A few things to watch out for

Most physical and sporting activities are fine for participation but contact sports such as football should be avoided. Consult a health professional if unsure.

People living with Spina Bifida do not have normal sensation. Burns and abrasions can occur easily from hot and/or rough surfaces.

Activities that involve extreme flexion/extension of your back and neck such as gymnastics are not recommended. Consult a health professional if unsure. Be considerate of lifting very heavy weights to avoid injury.

Sports to try!

- Sailing – Sailability www.sailability.org/au/australia
- Horse riding – Riding for the Disabled Association of Australia www.rda.org.au
- Bike riding
- Canoeing and paddling
- Bowling
- Wheelchair Sports - try all sorts of sports under the guidance of experienced coaches - NSW Wheelchair Sports Association Inc. www.wsnsw.org.au
- Anything that interests you!

You can find further information on being active at:

- “Burn Rubber Burn” is a health and fitness program run through PCYC for people over 12 with physical disabilities: www.pycnsw.org/prime_spats_burn_rubber
- ParaQuad NSW (Paraplegic and Quadriplegic Association of NSW) www.paraquad.org.au
- National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability’s Spina Bifida – Physical Activity Guidelines” http://www.ncpad.org/disability/fact_sheet.php?sheet=256
- The Sydney Children’s Hospital Network fact sheets www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets
- NSW Wheelchair Sports Association Inc. www.wsnsw.org.au
- Royal Rehab Return2Sport www.royalrehab.com.au/Return2Sport.html
- Look at www.d-ability.org for inspirational ideas and see what other people have tried.

Remember:

- Physical activity improves fitness and helps to maintain a healthy weight.
- Any physical activity is better than doing none.
- Upper body strength assists in independence.
- Sport is a chance for friendship and fun.
- Be active every day to keep healthy.