

# FACTSHEET

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## Be active Adolescents with Spinal Cord Injury

### Physical activity

Physical activity is vital for everyone, and especially for people living with Spinal Cord Injury. Physical activity will help to:

- Improve posture
- Improve self-esteem
- Prevent constipation
- Improve cardiovascular fitness
- Maintain and develop flexibility
- Build strong bones and muscles
- Improve mood and help relaxation
- Promote healthy growth and development
- Help achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- Improve balance and develop coordination skills.
- Provide opportunities for friendships and independence

### Fitness and injury prevention

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

To improve physical fitness, it is advised that everyone needs at least one hour (and up to several hours) of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.

A combination of moderate and vigorous activities ("huff and puff") is recommended. Try a variety of activities that are fun and suit your interests, skills and abilities.

Good exercise routines can stay with you throughout life.

We should not spend more than two hours a day using electronic media for entertainment, for e.g. computer games, TV or the internet, particularly during daylight hours.

A 5-10 minute warm up will help prepare the body for the activity. The warm up should consist of 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 to remove waste products from the muscles so they don't become sore and stiff. The cool down should be some continuous movement for 2-3 minutes e.g. slower chair pushing/running and stretching the muscles that were used in the activity.

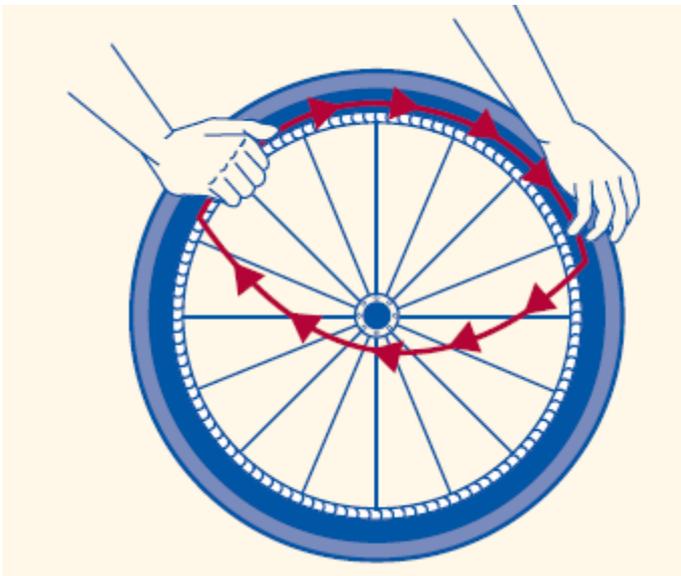
### Building strong upper body and limbs

Physical activity can help to build strong arms and torso. People living with Spinal Cord Injury need a strong upper body to help with balance; to move or transfer from their wheelchair; to propel the wheelchair and in some situations to walk using equipment.

Ways to use your upper body, build strength and improve fitness include:

- Swimming
- Walking the dog
- Rowing, canoeing and paddling
- Sports such as basketball and tennis
- Gym programs such as 'Burn Rubber Burn.'
- Using a bike with hand pedals – your OT/Physio can assist with adaptations.
- Pushing in your wheelchair over a distance, using long arm movements. Speak to your therapist about the best way to move the wheels of the wheelchair.

## PROPELLING YOUR 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 kept at high pressure to make pushing easier.
- A semi-circular push stroke is where your hand falls below the push rim between push strokes.

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## A few things to watch out for:

Due to your spinal cord injury you most likely do not have normal sensation. Burns and abrasions can occur easily from hot and/or rough surfaces eg. slippery dips and sand.

If you have poor balance when walking a wheelchair can be used successfully for sport, games and other physical education activities at home, school and in the community.

Consult with your Spinal Cord Injury Service if you are unsure about what activities you should avoid.

## Sports to try!

- Bowling
- Bike riding
- Canoeing and paddling
- Swimming – Rainbow Club  
[www.rainbowclubaust.com.au](http://www.rainbowclubaust.com.au)
- Sailing – Sailability [www.sailability.org/au/australia](http://www.sailability.org/au/australia)
- Horse riding – Riding for the Disabled Association of Australia [www.rda.org.au](http://www.rda.org.au)
- Wheelchair Junior Sports – try all sorts of sports under the guidance of experienced coaches - basketball, rugby, tennis, swimming, athletics, canoeing, winter sports, or sports camps. NSW Wheelchair Sports Association Inc. [www.wsnsw.org.au](http://www.wsnsw.org.au)

Anything that interests you!

## You can find further information about being active at:

- ‘Burn Rubber Burn’ is a health and fitness program run through PCYC for people over 12 years of age with physical disabilities:  
[www.pcyonsw.org/prime\\_sports\\_burn\\_rubber](http://www.pcyonsw.org/prime_sports_burn_rubber)
- “Armed for Life: Prevention Strategies and Management of Upper Limb Overuse Syndrome(s) for Persons with a Spinal Cord Injury (SCI): Strategies for upper limb preservation in daily activities following SCI.” [www.paraquad.org.au](http://www.paraquad.org.au)
- “Armed for Life: Prevention Strategies and Management of Upper Limb Overuse Syndrome(s) for Persons with a Spinal Cord Injury (SCI): Wheelchair Set up and Transfers.”
- The Sydney Children’s Hospital Network “Pressure relief technique and spinal cord injury” fact sheet  
[www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets](http://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets)
- NSW Wheelchair Sports Association Inc.  
[www.wsnsn.org.au](http://www.wsnsn.org.au)

## Remember:

- Physical activity improves fitness and helps to maintain a healthy weight.
- Any activity that sees you expend energy is good!
- Upper body strength assists in independence.
- Sport provides opportunities for friendship and fun.
- Be active every day to keep healthy