

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 with Spinal Cord Injury

Physical activity

Physical activity is very important for all children, and especially for children 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 your child is, the more they will enjoy being active and will also be less likely to suffer from injury.

To improve physical fitness, it is advised that your child 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. Children need the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities that are fun and suit their interests, skills and abilities.

Encouraging children to be active when they are young will help to establish routines that can stay with them throughout their life.

Children 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 be 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.

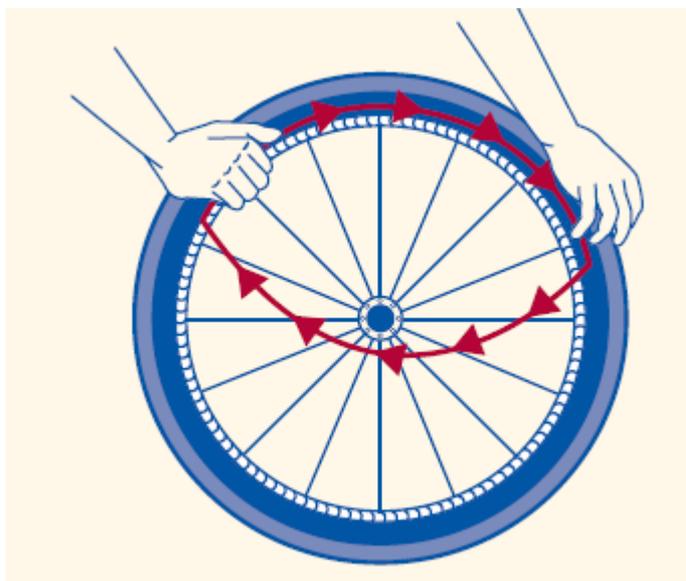
Building strong upper body and limbs

Physical activity can help to build strong arms and torso. Children with Spinal Cord Injury need a strong upper body to help with balance, to move or transfer from their wheelchair, to walk using equipment and to propel their wheelchair.

Ways to encourage a younger child to use their upper body and build strength include :

- Swimming
- Hitting a large beach ball with two hands
- Squeezing sponges in the bath
- Playing with water pistols or water spray bottles
- Push ups lying on their tummy
- Playing wheel barrow
- Batting a suspended ball with a small plastic racquet.
- Some suggestions for improving an older child's fitness include:
 - Pushing in their 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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- 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 changes.

A few things to watch out for

- Children living with Spinal Cord Injury do not have normal sensation. Burns and abrasions can occur easily from hot and/or rough surfaces eg. slippery dip and sand.
- Find the most appropriate activity for your child to participate in.
- If your child has 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 your child should avoid.

Sports to try!

- Bowling
- Bike riding
- Canoeing and paddling
- Swimming – Rainbow Club
www.rainbowclubaust.com.au
- Sailing – Sailability www.sailability.org/au/australia
- Horse riding – Riding for the Disabled Association of Australia 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
- 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 with physical disabilities.
www.pycnsw.org/prime_sparts_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
- “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.”
- Children’s Hospital Network “Pressure relief technique and spinal cord injury” fact sheet
www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/pressure-relief-technique-and-spinal-cord-injury
- NSW Wheelchair Sports Association Inc.
www.wsnsw.org.au

Remember:

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