

AGEING WELL

FACTSHEETS

sia spinal
injuries
association
FOR LIFE AFTER SPINAL CORD INJURY



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical Activity

The benefits of physical activity to health and well-being are well-documented. They can be enormous, maximising your abilities both physically and mentally.

However, physical activity encompasses a wide range of activities, not necessarily all of the intensive, sporting kind. Simple, but regular, gentle exercise incorporated into your daily routine can reap benefits and help keep you supple and your mind active. Exercise also has social benefits too if you join a club or group of like-minded people to follow your chosen activity.

General Benefits of Physical Activity

Health Benefits

- Improves and boosts the immune system
- Aids good circulation and maintains good skin tone
- Helps take nutrients and oxygen via the blood to all the vital organs
- Helps to reduce high blood pressure and the risk of cardiovascular disease
- Aids in weight control, along with eating healthy food.
- Increases energy levels
- Helps keep bones strong
- Improves quality of sleep

Social Benefits

- Widens your social circle through meeting up with others with shared interests
- Broadens your mind to exploring new opportunities

Psychological Benefits

- Improves self esteem
- Reduces feelings of stress
- Helps maintain a positive outlook

It may be a long time since you were discharged from hospital having completed your rehabilitation. Exercise probably formed some part in preparing you for the future. If you have not exercised since, it's never too late to start! On the other hand, if you have taken part in fairly strenuous sports or activities since you were injured, you may now be considering a

more gentle form of exercise. Doing so will help to conserve your shoulder and other vulnerable joints.



In the SIA Ageing Well Survey 2007, respondents cited physical fitness as their fifth most important concern after weight control issues.

Benefits Specific to those with SCI

- Aids muscle strength – important for propelling and transferring
- Increases flexibility – helpful when reaching for objects
- Decreases spasms – some sci people find that spasms, pain, stiffness and contractures are all decreased/avoided through regular exercise
- Improves posture and body shape – reducing the risk of falling
- Improves circulation – helps avoid pressure sores
- Increases aerobic endurance – which aids general stamina



In the Ageing Well Survey 2007, when respondents were asked about their exercise habits, 22% reported never being involved in active exercise with a further 10% engaging in active exercise less than once a week. With regard to passive exercise, 65% of respondents reported never engaging in passive exercise with a further 7% engaged in passive exercise less than once a week.

Here are just a few examples of activities which may be suitable for you:

- 1. Yoga and Tai Chi/Qigong** (which means engaging both the mind and the body). These forms of exercise are good for stretching (but be careful not to overstretch as this could cause sprains to muscles and ligaments). Go along to a class with a friend where you can learn the techniques under expert tuition and supplement this with the use of DVDs at home.
- 2. Resistance techniques and use of light weights** - using light weights home or in a gym can help build up and maintain strength. Once again you should have instruction from a fitness instructor first to ensure safety and get the best out of the techniques. Using weights usually involves repeating a series of movements a given number of times, known as repetitions. An advantage of using weights is that you can exercise specific muscles and muscle groups, so you can target, say, your upper arms where you may want

to increase your muscle tone to help with transfers etc. You can also use weights at home and, if you can't afford the weights themselves, you can always substitute bags of sugar, or tins of beans for the real thing.

3. **Swimming** - one of the best all-rounders for increasing flexibility and stamina and excellent for aerobic exercise.
4. **Bowls (Indoors or Outdoors)** – a great team sport, requires precision and good mental concentration. Bowls has a social element and, when played outdoors, offers the benefits of fresh air.
5. **Snooker/Pool** – another activity that has a strong social element and is also very competitive. Requires good concentration and a steady hand.
6. **Table Tennis** – you can either play at your own pace or train up to a high level. Good for increasing stamina and eye to hand co-ordination.
7. **Gym Workouts** – if you're solo, joining a gym is a great way to meet people. All gyms now have to include facilities for disabled people. Getting into a regular routine at the gym has many health benefits and if you plan a fitness programme with the gym staff that fits your needs and abilities, you'll soon notice an improvement in your physical and general health.
8. **Massage** – a weekly or monthly massage will help stimulate your circulation, improving lymph drainage. Also, most people report that a massage creates a wonderful 'feel good' factor.
9. **Exercise DVDs** – exercising in the privacy of your own home is ideal if you have difficulty getting out regularly, can't find a suitable venue or feel self-conscious about exercise in front of others. There's a huge range of exercise DVDs available, many of which are ideal for older people or those with restricted movements.
10. **Fencing** – Fencing has always been popular among spinal cord injured people with its national Body, the BDFa, having something for everyone – it can even provide a path to becoming a Paralympic champion! Alternatively, you could do a regular workout among friends or use it as a social base with the odd bit of exercise thrown in – in other words, it's as intense and ambitious as you want it to be. The BDFa can provide equipment for beginners, but once you've been bitten by the fencing bug you'll probably want to buy your own. The link to their website www.bdfa.org.uk
11. **Rambling** – getting out into the country is a great way to feel the benefits of fresh air, sunshine and feeling at one with nature. The Disabled Ramblers Club has many routes which are accessible or you could try www.walkswithwheelchairs.com which is a growing database of walks suitable for wheelchair users

12. FES – Functional Electrical Stimulation – FES Cycling is an effective way of keeping fit following SCI when regular exercise is difficult to get. This is a therapeutic activity that uses a transcutaneous (through unbroken skin) electrical current to initiate muscle contractions of paralysed lower limbs in person who have sustained a spinal cord injury”. To find out more about FES you can visit these websites:

www.physiofunction.co.uk/neurological-services/fes-cycling;
www.fescycling.com; www.odstockmedical.com/

13. Standing – Standing has significant benefits for SCI people, both physical and psychological. A regular programme of standing in a suitable standing frame can:

- Help reduce spasticity and prevent contractures in the hips and knees
- Help keep bones strong (you must weight bear to gain this benefit)
- Help reduce pressure sores through change of position
- Help keep bladder and bowel function problems to a minimum
- Help lung function and circulation
- Help to improve self-esteem

These are just a few of the activities you can try. Others include wheelchair cricket, tennis, archery and many more. You'll find a huge age range involved, so even if you're the 'wrong side' of 50 and haven't exercised for a while, don't let this put you off. There's many more like you and sports and exercise clubs and classes are well-known for their warm welcomes.

Before you start:

If you haven't exercised for a while, be sure that you start gently and always warm up your muscles before beginning any activity. Here's some top tips to make sure you exercise safely:



Top Tips

Pain – this is a sign that something is wrong, don't ignore it. STOP! You may have overdone things, so take a few days' break before you resume the activity and only continue if you're pain free.

Autonomic dysreflexia (AD) – if you are injured above T6 there is the risk that you may experience Autonomic Dysreflexia as your pulse rises. Your body may also have problems regulating sweating and temperature control. If

you're prone to AD, speak to your doctor before taking on any form of strenuous exercise.

Always **warm up** before exercise and warm down with some gentle exercise and stretching for about 5 minutes afterwards.

Try to **'mix it up'** to maintain your interest. Unless you decide to become a Paralympian (!), don't do the same exercises or activity for months at a time but make up a varied and interesting programme for yourself.

Drink sufficient water during exercise to stay hydrated and cool.

Be aware of the dangers of exercising outside in hot weather. If you are outside wear appropriate clothing (loose, cotton clothing is best).

Never exercise if you are ill – e.g. bladder or chest infections.

Before embarking on an exercise regime consult your GP or spinal consultant. You could also engage the help of a physiotherapist, personal trainer or SCI professional to get you started, that way you'll know that you're exercising in the safest and most effective way.

Try and find an 'exercise buddy' as this will help keep you motivated.

Be realistic with your goals. If you haven't exercised for a while, start off slowly and gradually build up as you get stronger and fitter.

But, most of all, ENJOY!

Useful Organisations / Websites

Ableize

Website giving information about groups and clubs in the UK listed by counties.

www.ableize.com/recreation-sports

British Wheelchair Bowls Association

Ian Blackmore (Chairman)

'Kerria'

Station Road

East Preston

West Sussex BN16 3AJ

T: 07932 791519

W: www.bwba.org.uk

@: IanBlackmore@bwba.org.uk

Cricket Federation for People with Disabilities

Dick Wildgoose

Wisholme

St. Martins Road

Gobowen

Oswestry

Shropshire SY11 3PL

T: 01691 650554

W: www.cfpd.org.uk

UK Tai Chi

Park View

Potterton Park

Potterton

Barwick-in-Elmet

Leeds LS15 4NN

T: 0113 393 5005

W: www.uktaichi.com

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ABOUT SIA



The Spinal Injuries Association (SIA) is the leading national user-led charity for spinal cord injured (SCI) people. Being user led, we are well placed to understand the everyday needs of living with spinal cord injury and are here to meet those needs by providing key services to share information and experiences, and to campaign for change ensuring each person can lead a full and active life. We are here to support you from the moment your spinal cord injury happens, and for the rest of your life.

For more information contact us via the following:

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SIA House
2 Trueman Place
Oldbrook
Milton Keynes
MK6 2HH

T: 01908 604 191 (Mon – Fri 9am – 5pm)

T: 0800 980 0501 (Freephone Advice Line, Mon – Fri, 11am – 1pm/2pm – 4.30pm)

W: www.spinal.co.uk

E: sia@spinal.co.uk

Charity No: 1054097

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PLEASE SUPPORT SIA

SIA relies on fundraising, donations and gifts in wills to provide services that help spinal cord injured people rebuild their lives.

With your help, we can provide the right support to spinal cord injured people and their families and friends so they can enjoy a full and independent life after injury. Your donation today will go towards changing someone's life.

I would like to give: £15 £20 £53 other amount £.....

Method of payment

I enclose a cheque/postal order/CAF voucher made payable to Spinal Injuries Association.

I would like to pay by Mastercard/Visa/Maestro/Switch (delete as appropriate)

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Email address.....

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If you tick the box it means for every £1 you donate we can claim an extra 25p from the taxman, at no extra cost to you. You need to pay an amount of income tax or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax we reclaim from HM Revenue and Customs – currently 25p in every £1 you give.

Please send your donation to: FREEPOST SPINAL INJURIES ASSOCIATION or you can donate online at www.spinal.co.uk

Thank you for your support!