

Physical Activity for People with Disabilities

Physical activity is a powerful tool for improving health, boosting mood, and creating connections. For people with physical disabilities, staying active can be particularly transformative, not only improving your physical health but also enhancing mental wellbeing.

At Disability Assist, we actively encourage everyone to incorporate physical activity into your life. In this guide, we will discuss the benefits of physical activity, provide practical tips for getting started and highlight resources both in Kent and nationwide that will help give you further guidance and support. Whether it's the allure of vibrant parks, the excitement of community sports, or the simple joy of a morning stretch, this is the perfect moment to explore new ways to move and get energetic.

The Benefits of Physical Activity

Engaging in regular physical activity offers numerous benefits, including:

- **Improved Physical Health:** Physical activity helps maintain a healthy weight, reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes, and enhances mobility and flexibility.
- **Enhanced Mental Wellbeing:** Exercise is known to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, improve mood, and boost self-esteem. It can also enhance cognitive function and decrease feelings of stress.
- **Increased Independence:** Regular activity can improve strength and endurance, making daily tasks easier and helping you to have greater independence.
- **Social Interactions:** Participating in group activities or community sports can provide opportunities to meet new people and build friendships.
- **Overall Quality of Life:** Physical activity contributes to a better quality of life by increasing energy levels, improving sleep, and providing a sense of accomplishment.

Getting Started

Here are some tips to help you get started with physical activity, whether you prefer to exercise at home or join community activities:

At Home

1. **Adapted Workouts:** The internet is a great source of information about how you can adapt exercise to suit your own abilities. Look for workout videos designed specifically for people with physical disabilities. These can include seated exercises, wheelchair workouts, and gentle

stretching routines. Have a look on YouTube by searching “seated workout” if you need some inspiration.

2. **Use Available Resources:** You don’t need to spend money on specialist equipment. Household items such as water bottles can be used instead of weights, and you can make use of chairs to assist with exercises. If you want to challenge yourself a bit more, resistance bands can be useful and you can buy these cheaply online.

3. **Set Realistic Goals:** Start with small, achievable goals and gradually increase the intensity and duration of your workouts as you become more comfortable and confident. Make sure you only do what you can and don’t try to push yourself too hard. You know your body best so listen to what it is telling you.

4. **Stay Consistent:** Consistency is key. Try to incorporate physical activity into your daily routine, even if it's just a few minutes at a time. It’s more important to do a little bit more often than trying to smash through one big workout once in a blue moon.

In the Community

1. **Join a Sports Club:** Many sports clubs offer adaptive sports programmes. Look for local clubs that provide activities like wheelchair basketball, adaptive swimming, or boccia. You can use online resources to find out what is available near you and some great websites to check out include Everyday Active Kent and Every Body Moves (details below). Both of these sites allow you to search for activities close to you and you can even filter according to your impairment.

2. **Participate in Group Classes:** Many gyms and leisure centres offer classes tailored for individuals with disabilities. These can range from yoga and Pilates to dance and aerobics. There may also be activities available through condition-specific support groups or organisations, such as the MS Trust or Wheelpower.

3. **Explore Outdoor Activities:** Consider activities such as adaptive cycling, hiking on accessible trails, or joining a walking group. Looking on websites of local councils, National Trust properties or other outdoor spaces can help you identify accessible paths or facilities so that you can work out whether a specific location is right for you.

4. **Seek Support and Advice:** Don't hesitate to ask for help from professionals, such as physiotherapists or personal trainers, who have experience working with individuals with disabilities. Ask around to see what people recommend – you never know what you might find!

Resources

To assist you further, here are some online resources that provide advice, information, and support if you are looking to get active:

1. Every Body Moves: This website offers information on local inclusive activities and sports
<https://www.everybodymoves.org.uk/>
2. Activity Alliance: Provides resources and support to help people with disabilities get active
<http://www.activityalliance.org.uk/>
3. Everyday Active Kent: Offers a range of activities and resources around Kent and features a database that allows you to search for activities close to you
<https://www.everydayactivekent.org.uk/>
4. Wheelpower: A national wheelchair sport charity whose website includes many videos for home-based workouts as well as online classes that you can sign up to
<https://www.wheelpower.org.uk/get-active/exercise-at-home/exercise-videos/>
5. MS Trust – Has information about building your own workout and suggestions of suitable exercises
<https://mstrust.org.uk/information-support/exercise-ms/build-your-own-exercise-routine>
6. YouTube – There are a number of free videos which are suitable for many impairment types, from challenging seated workouts to more gentle overall routines. Just do a search using some key words and see what you can discover.

Remember, the journey to becoming more physically active is personal and unique for everyone. Start at your own pace, find activities that you enjoy, and don't be afraid to seek out support. It's worth it to enjoy the many benefits that come with staying active.