

EXERCISING

FOLLOWING

A BRAIN INJURY



A safe and effective exercise program can play an important role in the rehabilitation process following a brain injury. For example, regular physical activity can help improve your balance and coordination, reduce reliance on assistive devices, and enhance your ability to do everyday activities and thus remain independent.

Furthermore, following a brain injury, individuals who exercise are typically less depressed and report better quality of life than those who do not exercise. The key is to determine what type of exercise is best for you and to follow a program that accommodates your individual needs and concerns.

Getting Started

- Talk with your health care provider before starting an exercise program and ask for specific programming recommendations.
- Take all medications as recommended by your physician.
- The goals of your program should be to improve cardiovascular fitness, increase muscle strength and endurance, improve range of motion, and increase independence, mobility and ability to do daily activities.
- You may find that it is easier to focus on your exercise if you avoid busy, crowded locations.
- You may need to do some exercises such as biking or walking with a workout buddy if you have difficulty with balance or with finding your way throughout a community.
- Choose low-impact activities such as walking, cycling or water exercises, which involve large muscles groups and may be done continuously.
- Start slowly and gradually progress the intensity and duration of your workouts. If your fitness level is low, start with shorter sessions (10 to 15 minutes) and gradually build up to 20 to 60 minutes, three to five days per week.
- Perform resistance training and range-of-motion exercises two days per week.
- Take frequent breaks during activity if needed.

Exercise Cautions

- Avoid exercises that overload your joints or increase your risk of falling. Begin each exercise in a stable position and monitor your response before proceeding.
- Reduced motor control in your limbs may restrict your ability to do certain exercises.
- Exercise equipment may need to be modified to accommodate your specific needs.
- Always wear protective headgear when cycling or doing any other activity in which a fall is possible, as the rate of a second head injury is three times greater after you have had one head injury
- Do not hesitate to ask for demonstrations or further explanations about how to perform exercises properly.

Your exercise program should be designed to maximize the benefits with the fewest risks of aggravating your health or physical condition. Consider contacting a certified health and fitness professional* who can work with you and your health care provider to establish realistic goals and design a safe and effective program that addresses your specific needs.

*If your health care provider has not cleared you for independent physical activity and would like you to be monitored in a hospital setting or a medical fitness facility, you should exercise only under the supervision of a certified professional. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) has two groups of certified fitness professionals that could meet your needs. The ACSM Certified Clinical Exercise Specialist (CES) is certified to support those with heart disease, diabetes and lung disease. The ACSM Registered Clinical Exercise Physiologist (RCEP) is qualified to support patients with a wide range of health challenges. You may locate all ACSM-certified fitness professionals by using the ProFinder at www.acsm.org.

For more information, visit www.exerciseismedicine.org or e-mail eim@acsm.org.

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