

Increasing Physical Activity among Adults with Disabilities: Doctors Can Play a Key Role

This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In the U.S., more than 21 million adults, ages 18 to 64, have a disability. These are adults with serious difficulty walking, climbing stairs, hearing, seeing, concentrating, remembering, or making decisions. Doctors and other health professionals can play a key role in increasing physical activity among adults with disabilities.

Welcome to CDC Audio Rounds. I'm Dr. Dianna Carroll, from CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

Aerobic physical activity helps us avoid chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some cancers. However, nearly half of adults with disabilities get no aerobic physical activity. Adults with disabilities are more likely to be physically active if their doctors recommend it, but in the past year, only 44 percent who visited a doctor were advised to get physical activity.

Here are five steps you can take to help your patients with disabilities be physically active.

Step One—Know the Physical Activity Guidelines; they're for everybody. Encourage at least two-and-a-half hours a week of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity. If this isn't possible, encourage them to be as active as they can, based on their abilities, and increase activity over time.

Step Two—Ask about physical activity. Use questions like, "How much physical activity are you currently doing each week?" and "What types of physical activity do you enjoy?"

Look beyond the disability and put the person first. Use terms such as "person with a disability" instead of "disabled" or "handicapped person."

Step Three—Discuss barriers to physical activity. These might include patients not knowing about or being able to get to programs, places, and spaces where they can be physically active; not having social support for physical activity; or not finding fitness professionals who can provide physical activity options that match their specific abilities.

Step Four—Recommend physical activity options based on your patients' abilities. Examples include hand-crank bicycling, wheelchair basketball or softball, and water aerobics.

Step Five—Refer patients to resources and programs to help them begin or maintain their physical activity. Use the "teach-back" method to make sure they understand the recommendations. Assess their activity levels at every visit.

To find resources for you and your patients with disabilities, visit cdc.gov/disabilities/PA.

Your patients may not meet the guidelines immediately, but over time and with support, they *can* become more physically active.

Physical activity is for everybody!

For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.