

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

## for Adults with Spinal Cord Injury



[www.sciactioncanada.ca/guidelines](http://www.sciactioncanada.ca/guidelines)

### PREAMBLE

These guidelines are appropriate for all healthy adults with chronic spinal cord injury, traumatic or non-traumatic, including tetraplegia and paraplegia, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity or socio-economic status. Adults are encouraged to participate in a variety of physical activities that are enjoyable and safe.

You should try to be active throughout the day, and in a variety of ways, in addition to your usual activities of daily living.

If you are newly injured, are pregnant, prone to autonomic dysreflexia, or have other medical conditions, you should talk to your health professional to find out what types and amount of physical activity are right for you. A health professional might include a doctor, a physiotherapist, or a qualified exercise professional.

As a safe progression towards meeting the guidelines it is appropriate to start with smaller amounts of physical activity and gradually increase how long, how often, and how hard you engage in physical activity.

**For important fitness benefits, adults with a spinal cord injury should engage in:**

**At least 20 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic activity 2 times per week,  
AND**

**Strength training exercises 2 times per week, consisting of 3 sets of 8-10 repetitions of each exercise for each major muscle group.**

How...?	Aerobic Activity	Strength Training Activity
<b>How often?</b>	<b>Two times per week</b>	<b>Two times per week</b>
<b>How much?</b>	Gradually increase your activity so that you are doing at least 20 minutes of aerobic activity during each workout session.	Repetitions are the number of times you lift and lower a weight.  Try to do 8-10 repetitions of each exercise. This counts as 1 set.  Gradually work up to doing 3 sets of 8-10 repetitions of each exercise.
<b>How hard?</b>	These activities should be performed at a moderate to vigorous intensity.  Moderate intensity: activities that feel somewhat hard, but you can keep doing them for a while without getting tired.  Vigorous intensity: activities that make you feel like you are working really hard, almost at your maximum, and you cannot do these activities for very long without getting tired.	Pick a resistance (free weights, cable pulleys, bands, etc.) heavy enough that you can barely, but safely, finish 8-10 repetitions of the last set.  Be sure to rest for 1-2 minutes between each set and exercise.
<b>How to?</b>	There are many ways to reach this goal, including:  <i>Upper Body Exercises:</i> wheeling, arm cycling, sports  <i>Lower Body Exercises:</i> Body weight supported treadmill walking, cycling  <i>Whole Body Exercise:</i> recumbent stepper, water exercise	There are many ways to reach this goal, including:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Free weights</li> <li>■ Elastic resistance bands</li> <li>■ Cable pulleys</li> <li>■ Weight machines</li> <li>■ Functional electrical stimulation</li> </ul>