

Physical Activity and Disabilities

By [Bonnie Bartos](#) posted 01-31-2019 20:11



Surprising numbers of news segments have covered physical activity options for individuals with disabilities over the past two months. Many of us are likely aware of Beep-Ball or baseball played by individuals with vision loss. The name of the game is due to the noise emitting device implanted in the ball. Players with visual impairment can hear the beeping of the ball and sound intensity provides additional information on the location of the orb. Wheelchair marathons, wheelchair basketball, and tandem-biking are other activities with modifications for those with differing abilities. Can you think of any other sports with adaptations for people with disabilities?

Another selection of group and individual activity that comes to mind are Cross-Country Skiing, Alpine Skiing, and Sledding. Guides help direct skiers with vision loss so they can safely travel down the slopes and through the valleys. Skis, sleds, and Snowboards are now available in accessible forms for individuals with limb loss. A secure chair on equipment known as a Sit-Ski allows those with vision loss safely experience the joy of skiing – they sit in the seat on a wide ski or snowboard. A skilled skier holds onto the back of the Sit-Ski and guides the person using it down the slopes.

Advancement in access to multiple forms of physical activity for people with different levels of ability is impressive. NPR aired a piece in December of 2018 covering the Hockey League in Minneapolis opening hockey opportunities to children and young adults with visual impairment. The puck contains a silver ball in the center and, rotation of the ball as the puck glides across the ice generates a scraping sound. That sound allows those with limited or no vision to know where the puck is and be aware of its direction and speed of travel. One hockey player interviewed was delighted by this event of equal access hockey as it was the first opportunity for him to share the enjoyment of the game with his little sister who has vision loss. They both stated they were excited about their next chance to play hockey together.

There are many programs for dancers with disabilities all over the world. One such program, through the National Dance Institute (NDI), is known as D.R.E.A.M. Dream is an initialism for Dancers Realize Excellence through Arts and Movement. The program pairs dancers with disabilities with “neuro-typical peers” who work with their partners, so each dancer participates at their best level. The program relies on teamwork, creative exploration, and empathy. NDI also works with a performance for students with visual impairment at the Lighthouse Guild in New York. The full name of the school is The Filomen M. D’Agostino Greenberg Music School at Lighthouse Guild. The Lighthouse Program runs for the entire school year, concluding with a performance of each students dance skills.

The programs noted above are well-structured and in larger areas. What recommendations can we make for increasing physical activity for patients with different abilities? One resource that may provide ideas for accessibility and inclusiveness is the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD). This organization promotes the inclusion of people with chronic illness or disabilities in a variety of physical and social activities. We all know that inclusion and participation in physical and social activities help promote wellbeing and reduce health risks. NCHPAD’s website is <https://www.nchpad.org/>, and you will find lots of information on their program and the development of Independent Health Coalitions throughout the United States that help them fulfill their mission of, “Building Healthy Inclusive Communities” and improving the health of our country.

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