

## Physical Activity After an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

It is very important to stay active after an acquired brain injury (ABI). Benefits include:

- › Lower risk of falling
- › Better mood
- › Better balance
- › More self-confidence
- › Better coordination
- › More independence in your daily activities
- › Better muscle strength and endurance

Your health care team will work with you to plan a program that meets your needs and interests.

### How will an ABI affect my physical activity?

Throughout your recovery, you may have symptoms that limit the types of activities you can do safely.

- › If you have weakness in your arms or legs, you may need to focus more to control them.
- › If your brain is working harder to control your movements, you will not be able to move as much or as fast.
- › If you feel tired, you may have to take breaks.

### How can I do more physical activity safely?

Know your limits. **Talk to a member of your health care team before starting to exercise.**

### What are the types of physical activity?

#### Aerobic exercise (cardio)

- Aerobic exercise is any activity that raises your heart rate. Examples:
  - › Moving your legs and arms while sitting
  - › Swimming
  - › Walking
  - › Dancing
- Warm up for 3 to 5 minutes before you exercise, and cool down for 3 to 5 minutes after.
- Start by exercising for 5 to 10 minutes at a time. As you feel more comfortable, slowly add a few minutes each time, until you are exercising for 20 to 30 minutes at a time.
- Try to get 2 ½ hours of moderate activity each week. For example: Exercise for 30 minutes, 5 times a week.

#### Intensity (how hard your body is working)

- To measure intensity during exercise, do the talk test:
  - › Moderate intensity: You can talk, but not sing, while doing the activity.
  - › Vigorous intensity: You cannot say more than a few words without stopping to breathe. If your activity causes you to be out of breath or you cannot talk, lower your intensity by slowing down.

#### Strength training

- After an ABI, strength training can help improve your ability to walk. Examples:
  - › Moving from sitting to standing
  - › Squats

- Strength training is done in sets (repeating an activity a certain number of times). For example: Do 1 set of squats, then 10 squats in a row.
- Do strength training for large muscles, 2 to 3 days a week. Do 1 to 2 sets of 10 to 15 repetitions for each activity.
- When done right, strength training does not cause a lot of muscle pain or stiffness.

### **Balance training**

- Balance training can help to improve your balance. It is important to do activities that challenge your balance safely. Stay safe and know your limits. Examples:
  - › Reaching with your arms
  - › Standing with your feet together
- If your ABI has strongly affected your balance, start balance training while sitting down. Build up to balance activities while holding onto a sturdy object, then standing with someone nearby for support.
- Do balance activities for 10 to 15 minutes, 2 to 3 days a week.

### **Gait (the way you walk) training**

- After an ABI, there may be a change in your gait (like limping, dragging your foot, or stumbling often). It is important to think about your gait when you walk. Try to take even, balanced steps. Examples:
  - › Using a mobility aid (like a cane or a walker) to help you focus on your steps
  - › Stepping slower and thinking more about where you are stepping
  - › Doing the exercises in this pamphlet and as told by your health care team

**Ask your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner):**

- › how to start a physical activity program.
- › about your physical activity limits.

**If you have any new symptoms (like pain, dizziness, or trouble breathing):**

- Stop exercising right away

**AND**

- Call your primary health care provider or 911

### **Resources**

**Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines**

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

**Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada**

[www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca)

**Brain Injury Canada**

[www.braininjurycanada.ca](http://www.braininjurycanada.ca)

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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