



Exercising with cerebral palsy

Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

How to get started

An exercise plan improves physical fitness, widens social activities and improves your quality of life. It also significantly improves cardiovascular function, mobility, muscle strength and a sense of health and wellbeing.

Inactivity may contribute to the development of secondary conditions associated with cerebral palsy such as joint contractions, osteoporosis and decreased lung and blood circulatory function. Regular exercise and improved physical fitness can help prevent these conditions. There is increasing recognition of the medical necessity in providing access to active exercise at school and at home for those with cerebral palsy, so ask for support and demonstrations to help you exercise regularly.

Choose activities and exercises you enjoy! Your doctor or healthcare professional can devise an exercise plan to improve your health and ability to enjoy the activities of daily living, modifying specific exercises to meet your needs and minimize side effects of medicines, if necessary.

Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist. Some medicines may affect the intensity of your cardiovascular exercise so talk to your doctor if you have any issues.

Warm up and cool down

Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely. Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely. Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

Be active

Some is good, more is better

How hard:	Aim for at least 150-300 minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least 75-150 minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve.
How hard:	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.
How long:	Aim to spread out your session throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10-minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer.

What type:	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities. Try arm bikes, the recumbent bicycle, specialist gym equipment, or 'drive' or wheel your wheelchair for a cardiovascular workout. If you have trouble keeping your foot on the pedals, try using an Ace wrap or rubber strap to keep them on. Join an adapted sports, yoga, or dance class.
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What will it do for me?

Exercise significantly improves your overall health and ability to do the activities of daily living. It significantly reduces your risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, some cancers, obesity and stroke.

Build strength

How much:	At least twice a week.
How hard:	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.
How long:	Choose a variety of 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body, and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Aim for 1–3 sets of each exercise.
What type:	Try single joint exercises such as knee extensions and progress to multi joint exercises such as squats, sit to stand or lateral step ups if your abilities allow. The use of ankle or cuff weights and resistance machines are most appropriate to ensure optimal strength training. You can work on strength exercises in a standing position with physical assistance or in a chair or wheelchair.

What will it do for me?

Strengthening exercises help to maintain bone, muscle and joint health. Regular strength exercises helps gross motor function and your health-related quality of life.

Improve balance

How much:	At least three days a week. Start with one session per week if necessary, and gradually work towards two.
How hard:	Try 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10-15 times.
How long:	Hold each balance for 10-30 seconds.
What type:	Try yoga, Tai Chi, home balance exercises, chairbased balance exercises or a group class. If you are at high risk of falling, do seated balance exercises or use a sturdy chair or wall for support. Ensure the area you are exercising in and the type of balance exercise is safe.

What will it do for me?

Practising balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to a loss of balance and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries.



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Sedentary living

Reduce the amount of time being sedentary. Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity). It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class to improve your motivation levels and engage in social activities. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer! Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none.**

Exercise safety

Ensure you can use equipment correctly and that you are able to quickly and safely release any weights, straps, wraps or gloves that help you to exercise securely.

Ask for support from a trained health and fitness professional if using equipment that you may need to get out of quickly.

Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level.

Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you.

Helpful Resources

The Cerebral Palsy Canadian Network provides a database of resource for sports and recreation and additional programs for individuals living with cerebral palsy. <https://www.cpcanadane twork.com/copy-of-resources>

Adapt to Perform provides a large collection of wheelchair exercise videos. <https://www.youtube.com/c/AdaptToPerform>

Scan for more physical activity resources!

