



Exercising with visual impairment

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

Regular exercise is important in maintaining your overall health and helping to reduce the health risks of inactivity. Regular exercise significantly reduces your risks of heart disease, some cancers, obesity, type 2 diabetes, stroke and osteoporosis. It also helps improve sleep and reduces depression, anxiety and stress. Regular exercise will help you maintain better vision, a healthy weight, boost your immune system, improve your stamina and ability to do everyday activities such as chores and enjoy leisure activities with family and friends.

Do not let visual impairment prevent you from enjoying regular exercise! Visual impairment generally does not affect the health and social benefits that can be derived from regular exercise. Choose regular activities you enjoy doing, in environments that you are comfortable in and help you stick to your physical activity plan over the long term.

Ask your doctor or healthcare provider about using a sighted guide, or the use of touch or equipment such as a rope guide to help you exercise. Exercising on a stationary bike or treadmill or joining a spin class at a gym may help you increase your independent exercise plan.

Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.

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

	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. Use a handrail or equipment that has support if balance is a problem. Ask for a sighted guide to help support you.

How much:	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities: walking, cycling, dancing, swimming, water aerobics, hiking—choose something you enjoy! Recreational team sports such as soccer, tennis, or volleyball are great social activities too! Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health.
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What will it do for me?

Regular exercise significantly improves health, improves your balance, posture, coordination, tense neck and shoulder muscles, and helps improve the loss of spinal rotation and reciprocal arm swing associated with visual impairments.

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.
How long:	Choose a variety of 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Try 1–2 sets.
What type:	Ask for demonstrations or support to use equipment properly. A variety of strength exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a can of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight. Strength exercises you can do at home include squats, calf raises, wall push-ups, arm curls, knee curls, front and side arm raise, and chair stand.

What will it do for me?

Regular strength exercises help maintain bone, muscle and joint health. Losses in upper and lower limb strength as a result of inactivity associated with vision loss can contribute to an increased falls risk.

Improve balance

How often:	At least three days a week. Start with one session per week, if necessary, and gradually work towards two.
How hard:	Choose 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 or home balance exercises such as standing on one foot, a heel-to-toe walk or a balance walk lifting one leg at a time. Ask for a sighted guide to help you, or family or a friend, or attend an assisted group exercise class. Ensure the area you are exercising in and the type of balance exercise is safe. If you are at high risk of falling, do seated balance exercises or use a sturdy chair or wall for support.

What will it do for me?

Practicing 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. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer. Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none!**

Exercise safety

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

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.

Resources

The Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability provides tips on how to create a barrier free environment during physical activity for individuals living with a visual impairment. <https://ala.ca/resource/tip-sheets/blindness-visual-impairment>

