Health Benefits of Exercise for Persons with Disabilities

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In their seminal report "Physical Activity and Health", the U.S. Surgeon General's (1996) concluded that regular physical activity can have a significant health benefit for people of all ages, both male and female disabled and non-disabled. The Surgeon General expressed a sense of urgency in increasing the frequency and duration of physical activity participated in, stating that:

"Because physical activity is so directly related to preventing disease and premature death and to maintaining a high quality of life, we must accord it the same level of attention that we give other important public health practices that affect the entire nation. Physical activity thus joins the front ranks of essential health objectives, such as sound nutrition, the use of seat belts, and the prevention of adverse health effects of tobacco."

The health benefits of regular physical activity have been shown to be the same for people with and without disabilities (Brenes et al, 1986; Minor and Hewett, 1995; Siegel et al, 1970; Cowell et al, 1987; Kaplan et al, 1981; Hoffman, 1987; Nilsson et al, 1995; Sinclair and Ingram, 1980; Gaffney et al, 1981; Kristensen et al, 1980; Gehlsen et al, 1981).

However it has been observed that people with disabilities (PWD) participate less, have lower levels of fitness and higher metabolic cost of physical activity than able-bodied peers (Oligiati et al, 1988; Olney et al, 1986). People with disabilities accrue additional benefits from participating in regular moderate physical activity, including:

- **PWD who are physically active have decreased rate of hospital admission (compared with inactive) and physical activity is seen to prevent and/or ameliorate co-morbidity including contractures, decubitis ulcers and deep-vein thrombosis (Stotts, 1986; Patrick and McClelland, 1985; Hopkins et al, 1987; Marge, 1988; McAdam and Natvig, 1980; Agre et al, 1987; Hardy and Jones, 1986);**

- **Regular physical activity is seen to have a positive influence on the measures of independence, activities of daily living and quality of life (Marge, 1988; Spira, 1980; Petrofsky and Heaton, 1983; Oligiati and Di Prampero, 1986).**

- **Physical activity decreases psychological sequelae associated with disability (Meyer, 1981; Shepherd, 1991; Green et al, 1984; Bar-Ord et al, 1976).**

Reference list attached.

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