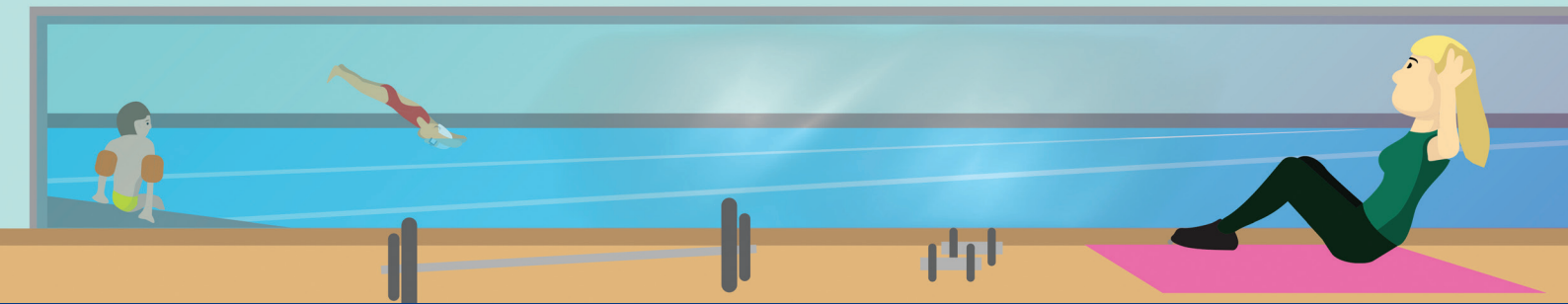


# Being Active

An every day guide for people  
living with an impairment or  
health condition





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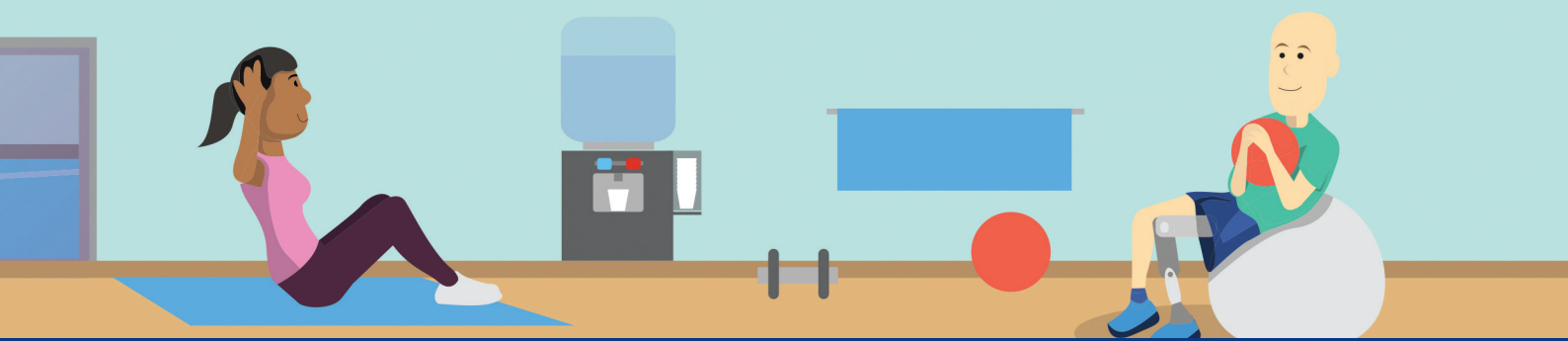
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# Introduction

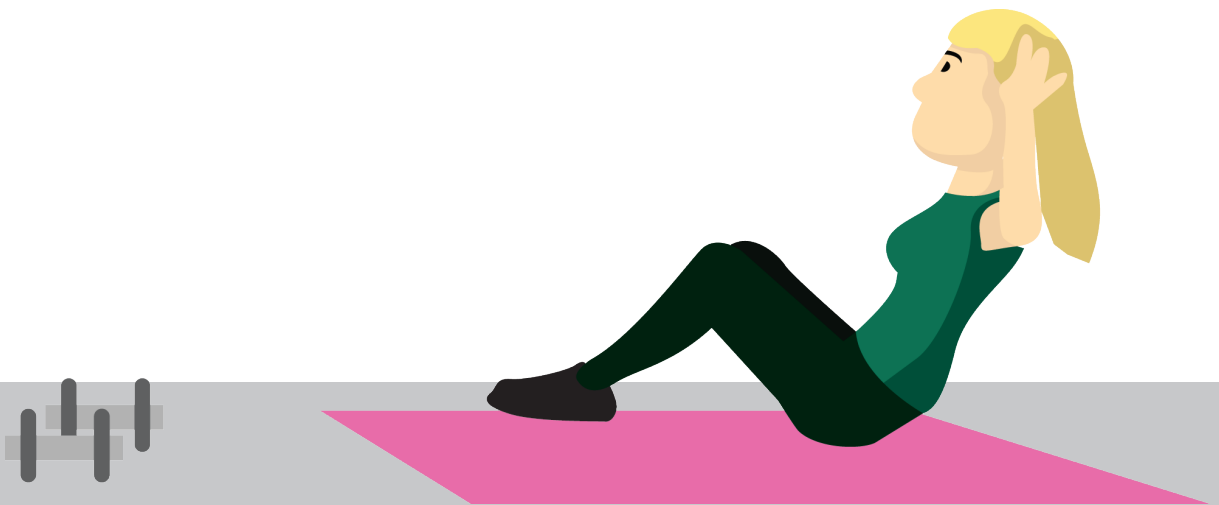
**Most disabled people are not as active as they'd like to be. This guide, from the English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) and Disability Rights UK, will change that by providing the information you need to get started.**

According to Sport England's survey<sup>1</sup>, four out of five disabled people take little or no exercise. But that's not because we don't want to. EFDS<sup>2</sup> research found that seven in ten disabled people want to increase their physical activity.

Even if you're not sure being more active is beneficial or even possible for you, read on. Being Active is for everyone with lived experience of disability or health conditions.

True, there isn't space to discuss the issues around every impairment or every sport or every one of the many, many possibilities. We all have different barriers so not everything here will be relevant to you. But we hope by reading the guide, you can see how it might apply to you.

“ 7 in 10 disabled people want to increase their physical activity. ”



1. Active People Survey 7

2. The English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) lifestyle report from September 2013



# 1: Why should I get more active?

Being active will improve your health and well-being physically and mentally regardless of your impairment. It will also have enormous social benefits.

## I can't get more active, I'm disabled

After you have read some of the examples in this guide, you may feel differently. Of course, your impairment or health condition may affect what you can do. But whatever your impairment or health condition, being more active can only make you fitter and healthier.

“ Participating in sports helps to build your body and mind. It also boosts your confidence and self-esteem. ”

## How will being active improve my health?

Doctors often say that if exercise were a pill, everyone would take it because it is so effective. And they're right. According to the NHS<sup>3</sup>, people who do regular physical activity will enjoy:

- a 30% lower risk of early death
- up to a 35% lower risk of coronary heart disease and stroke
- up to a 50% lower risk of type 2 diabetes
- up to a 50% lower risk of colon cancer
- up to a 30% lower risk of depression
- up to a 30% lower risk of dementia

There are also a lot of benefits that can't be measured. Achieving a goal, however small, is empowering. This will boost self-confidence in all areas of life.

Exercise may tire you at the time but in the long-term it will give you more energy. You may sometimes find that regular exercise makes it easier to complete your every day activities, like getting up and dressed in the morning. It also improves sleep which means you get a double-boost to your energy levels. It helps memory, brain function and will reduce stress. Exercising is also a great time to do some thinking and problem-solving.

## People who are regularly active have:

30% lower risk of early death

Up to 35% lower risk of coronary heart disease and stroke

Up to 50% lower risk of type 2 diabetes

Up to 50% lower risk of colon cancer

Up to 30% lower risk of dementia

Up to 30% lower risk of depression

Experts<sup>4</sup> suggest that the mental benefits of being active are probably at their strongest if we:

- share it with others - anything from just walking with a friend to a class in a gym or swimming pool or local hall
- do it outside - the natural environment is more mentally stimulating than looking at a screen

Last but not least, getting active will become fun (even if it isn't at first). And the more fun it is, the more you'll benefit.

## How will being active improve my social life?

Exercise can be a great social activity. It will help you get out, meet people and make friends.

By boosting your sense of well-being you'll be more sociable and have more energy for social activities.

## How much exercise do I need to take?

As much as you want. Don't see exercise as separate from your life. Build exercise in. Little and often.

When health professionals and fitness experts talk about 'regular physical activity', they're usually talking about taking about 20 minutes or so a day of exercise that is hard enough to raise your heart rate and cause a sweat. That's about 2 hours and 30 minutes a week, the level of exercise on which the sort of health-related data mentioned above is usually based. It's called 'moderate-intensity aerobic activity'.

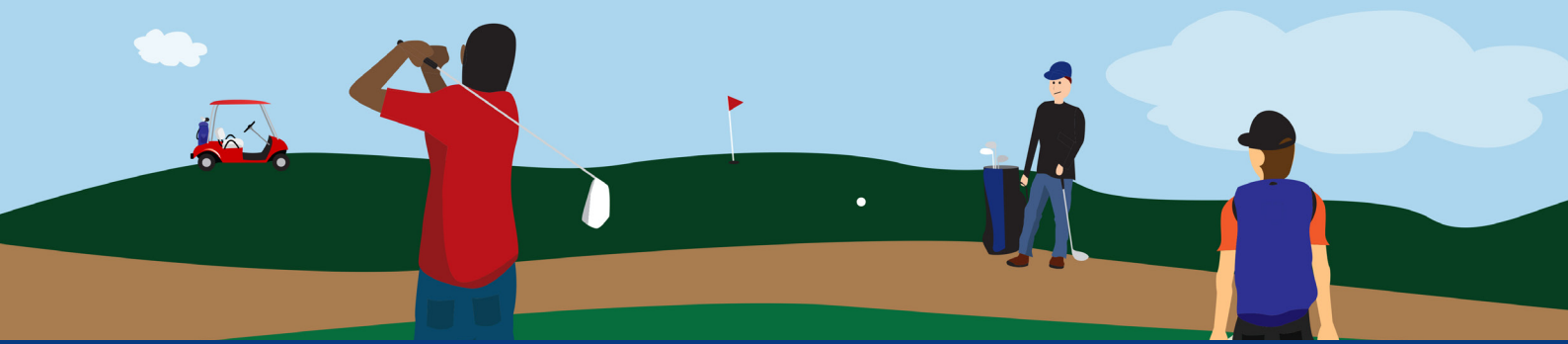
Exactly what constitutes moderate-intensity aerobic activity varies for each of us depending on how fit we are to start off with. But good examples of moderate-intensity aerobic activities are:

- walking/pushing fast
- riding a bike on level ground or with few hills
- pushing a lawn mower

How do you know if something is, for you, a moderate-intensity aerobic activity? A good rule of thumb is that you're too breathless to sing but not to talk.

“ I was overweight so I didn't think I could just go out jogging. As a child I'd been a decent swimmer so I decided to try that. I enjoyed the simple repetition. Quarter of a mile. Half a kilometre. Every couple of lengths there's a landmark. I mixed the strokes up too. The counting kept me focused and diverted me from my (real and imagined) problems. ”

4. [http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard\\_Mens\\_Health\\_Watch/2013/May/get-your-heart-pumping-in-the-fight-against-forgetfulness?utm\\_source=mens&utm\\_medium=pressrelease&utm\\_campaign=mens0513](http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Mens_Health_Watch/2013/May/get-your-heart-pumping-in-the-fight-against-forgetfulness?utm_source=mens&utm_medium=pressrelease&utm_campaign=mens0513)



## 2: How do I get more active?

### I haven't exercised for years. How do I start?

To be on the safe side, talk to your healthcare professionals before starting to check what activities might or might not be suitable.

Start slowly and build up. There's no quick fix. Just remember one simple rule: don't do more today than you'll be able to do tomorrow. Your GP may be able to refer you to your local active health team for advice and sessions from a qualified trainer.

If you experience chest pain, dizziness or feel faint at any time while you're exercising, stop immediately and see a doctor. During exercise you should feel no more than a burning sensation in your muscles, not a sharp pain. If something hurts, stop doing it.



### Safe heart rates

Here is the maths behind safe aerobic exercise. This applies to all of us but it is especially important to be aware of it if you are not fit or haven't exercised for a long time.

- Subtract your age from 220 (if you're a man) or 226 (if you're a woman). This gives you your Maximum Heart Rate (MHR)
- Exercising at 50-60% of your Maximum Heart Rate is fine for beginners. You get pretty much all the benefits at this level anyway

You can get heart rate monitors as watches or even as an app for your phone.

### What should I do?

Whatever you like. Choose something that you like and that gets the heart going a little and do a little more of it. It needn't be anything that we traditionally think of as sport. It could be yoga, walking, dancing, horse-riding or going to the gym.

Focus on heart (cardio-vascular) fitness, flexibility, strength, coordination and balance. This will help you keep active for as long as possible and also have the most benefits for mental wellbeing.

Walking ticks all these boxes.

Make it interesting. Set simple targets. Try something new if you're getting bored.



## How do I remove the barriers to being more active?

EFDS looked at the barriers to disabled people getting more active<sup>5</sup>, including the accessibility of places or equipment, their location, their cost, their suitability. You may be thinking of some of these barriers yourself and how they affect your life.

The disabled people involved in the research felt that most of the barriers related to their own confidence or the way others acted towards them.

More and more places are becoming accessible and there is more specialist equipment. Most of the ideas in this guide don't require special equipment or a special place and most don't cost. If the attitudes of other people are a barrier, there are legal requirements people should be following to help you access more opportunities.

Leisure centres, swimming pools, tennis clubs and tennis courts, golf clubs, rugby, cricket and football clubs, ice rinks, riding schools and equestrian centres, gyms, health and fitness clubs, rowing and sailing clubs, adventure centres and sporting venues are all covered by the Equality Act 2010 and must make 'reasonable adjustments' to make their facilities inclusive. Most are happy to. Customers are good for business.

This applies to paid-for and free services (including free trials) and includes changing facilities (you should be able to change in the same privacy and comfort as a non-disabled person).

Health and safety is no excuse. Under the law, disabled people are entitled to make the same choices and to take the same risks within the same limits as anyone else so any decision taken on the basis of health or safety must be proportionate to the real risk.

In other words, if you want to use any facilities, ask. If they're not accessible to you, there may be some 'reasonable adjustments' that can be made. Perhaps they've not come across someone with your impairment or health condition before. If you can see a 'reasonable adjustment' that is not offered, suggest it. After all, you're best placed to know.

For further information on the Equality Act 2010, visit [www.gov.uk/equality-act-2010-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/equality-act-2010-guidance)

“ Other people's attitudes can get in the way of disabled people doing sports. Chief among them is that it would be too dangerous. But where are the stats to back that up? Thousands of sighted people crash their cars every year and yet still carry on driving afterwards? Shouldn't disabled people be allowed to have accidents too? ”



## What if I don't feel confident enough?

- I've never liked exercise
- I don't like getting sweaty
- I look stupid when I run
- My impairment/health conditions prevents me from exercising
- I'm too busy
- I'm too uncoordinated

You've probably heard a lot of these. Are there any others? Some of our excuses relate to our impairment or health condition, some don't. They all keep us inactive.

Who cares what you look like? Do what you enjoy. Or something you've never tried before. Think broadly beyond the traditional sports. What about rambling, yoga or dancing?

Think of ways of doing what you want to do differently. Put stabilisers on your bike. Swim with a rubber ring or armbands. Fancy roller-blading but not sure about your balance? Use Nordic walking sticks as an aid. Worried your dancing is dodgy? Dance at home.

You don't have to go to a gym or sports centre. There are many exercises you can do at home with no or cheap equipment. There is a lot of satisfaction in simply doing one more repetition of an exercise than you did the day before.

Again, depending on your impairment, you might want to get some personal advice from your health professional, local disabled person's organisation, club or group or a fitness coach for people with your impairment.

“ I didn't have great coordination and as a wheelchair-user I'd lost all mobility in my legs. I needed to strengthen them. We started with a couple of sessions a week of an hour and a half and now have three of three hours. In fact, I'm now more mobile than before I had myopathy and can now walk miles using a walking frame. ”

## But I use a wheelchair

The advice on how much exercise you should take applies to us all. If you are a wheelchair-user, think how you can apply the advice to you and your life.

If you can, one obvious idea is moving your chair manually. This builds up certain muscles. But it can also make them tight and prone to injury while the constant pushing motion can put a strain on other parts of your body. Get some advice before doing too much of this. The right muscle-strengthening exercises for the shoulders and back should help you avoid most problems.<sup>6</sup>

One of the organised wheelchair sports might be fun. As well as getting the right advice, you'll meet new people and get a regular work-out. There is more about wheelchair sports in the DRUK publication *Doing Sport Differently*. Organisations like WheelPower can also help.



## I'm busy. How do I build exercise into my everyday life?

Modern society encourages us to consume exercise by paying for memberships and buying more equipment. This leads us to see exercise as an additional leisure activity. Of course, it can be that - and equipment and gadgets can make exercise fun - but it need not be.

There are umpteen ways to build activity into your everyday life when you can:

- take the stairs not the lift
- get a pedometer to count your steps. The NHS says we should aim for 10,000 a day. But you don't have to do that. A pedometer will allow you to set targets that work for you<sup>7</sup>.
- do something active in your lunch-break (your afternoon performance will be better than if you sit at your desk with a sandwich)
- get an exercise buddy - or a dog
- do the housework and gardening
- go for a walk with your friend rather than meeting for coffee
- play with the kids, grandchildren or even colleagues after work (anything from throwing a frisbee to setting up a softball team)
- get off the bus or train a stop or two early and walk or park further away (also reduces parking stress)
- exercise watching TV (static bikes are popular for this)
- walk to the shops (you won't be able to carry as much so you'll need to go more often which increases the benefit!)
- combine exercise with digging, planting etc. through a Green Gym ([www.tcv.org.uk/greengym](http://www.tcv.org.uk/greengym))





## 3: What should I do?

### Can walking really make a difference?

If you can walk, there's no easier and more effective exercise.

There are three great advantages to walking:

- You don't need to warm up, change into special clothing or shower afterwards
- It is easy to incorporate it into your existing day (by, for example, leaving the car at home)
- It is usually injury-free

You can also meet other people by joining a walking or rambling group.

“ I like walking - I walk the dog for 40 minutes a day. I like the fresh air, sunshine and exercise. Dogs are great for people with mental health conditions - they love you and are always there for you. The dog is my companion but he's also my incentive to go out when I don't feel like it. ”

### What about cycling?

Like walking, cycling is a great form of transport that gets you fitter at the same time. UK roads are not always bike-friendly but there are more and more cycling lanes and opportunities to ride off-road.

There are tricycles, quad cycles, recumbent, power-assisted bicycles and hand-powered bikes called handcycles. Side-by-sides or tandems allow two to ride at once. Running bikes, half-way between running and walking, are good for people with impairments that affect their mobility and balance. There are static exercise bikes too.



“ I had a stroke when I was 31. I didn't have the balance to ride a bicycle but I chanced across a small-wheeled tricycle in a local shop. I rode it for five minutes and realised that, once I'd attached the plastic 'rat-trap' on the pedal to my foot, I could ride it. I cycle ten miles every day to and from work and I'm as fit as a fiddle. But the greatest benefit is mental. ”

## I fancy running

There is plenty of advice available for new runners but it all boils down to one thing: don't get injured. (Actually that's good advice for any new exercise regime.)

Often new joggers start off slowly, go a little faster and a little further each time and then, after a handful of runs, get injured. The reason is that the heart and lungs often rise to the challenge more quickly than the muscles and skeleton.

So take it easy. Warm-up with some walking and stretching. Don't run every day at first. Wear proper running shoes suited to your feet. And most importantly: don't do more today that you will be able to do tomorrow.

“ Because I'm blind I was always afraid of running. But when I read a story in the local newspaper and I thought 'I could do that'. Doing something like Race for Life has given me a goal to aim for. I now run on my own, without my guide dog, using group leaders as my support, which shows just how far I have come. ”

## Can I exercise at home?

There are some excellent exercises you can do at home which require no equipment at all including the press up, the sit-up, the burpee and the plank. A TV or games console can help. There are also many DVDs available featuring exercise routines for people with different impairments or conditions.

Just 5-10 minutes a day exercise will help. But get advice first if you have a physical impairment - exercises that are not suited to you may be dangerous.

“ I told my personal trainer about my mobility and the operations I'd had. I said 'I can't run, can't grip and can't get down on the floor'. He said 'fine!', put some music on and said: 'let's dance'. I said 'you've got to be joking'. But I did and it was hysterical. Within 15 minutes we were both laughing. ”  
Ten years later, it's still fun.

## How do I choose a gym?

You can get personalised advice and boost your social life at a good gym. The best bet is one of the nearly 400 IFI-accredited gyms.

The Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI) is managed by EFDS and the accredited gyms mean everyone can enjoy accessible facilities, equipment, staff training and marketing.

Visit any gym you're interested in at peak time (usually 6-9pm) and ask yourself a few questions. Is it overcrowded? Is there suitable equipment? Is it clean and well-maintained? Is there somewhere to warm-up/down? What are the changing rooms and showers like? Have the instructors experience working with disabled people?

Check fees carefully. You don't have to join a private gym. Many local authority gyms are excellent and may have higher levels of disability-awareness among their staff.

Try it out. Before joining, get a daily or weekly pass. Some gyms offer free trials.

**Find your nearest IFI facility at the EFDS website ([www.efds.co.uk](http://www.efds.co.uk)). Search on 'Inclusive Fitness Initiative' and use the Facility Search.**

## Can I swim?

Swimming is one of the safest ways to exercise as your body is supported up to 90% by the water. Perhaps that's why it's one of the most popular activities with disabled people. Plus because water is about 12 times as thick as the air, the water resistance maximises the benefit you get from your movements.

This means that swimming is a little like jogging and lifting weights at the same time.

“ Don't think that you can not do something without trying it first. I always thought I wasn't very good at swimming before attending a local event. ”

“ Some say my stroke is all wrong and that I swim like a frog, but I can swim 40 lengths of my local pool without stopping so ungraceful as my stroke may be, it works OK. ”

## What about sports?

This guide is about being active every day. There are also umpteen sports out there that can be played by disabled and non-disabled people alike. The Paralympics, particularly London 2012, have made everyone more aware of just how many adapted sports there are. You can find more information and people to contact at the back of this guide.

“ I began sailing when I had already turned 50. As a wheelchair-user, sailing is freedom. My advice is just try it. I've never met anyone who has tried it and not liked it. It's not expensive and it's totally safe. We have buoyancy aids just like non-disabled sailors, but to tell you the truth the only people I've ever seen fall overboard have not been disabled. ”

“ Table tennis is a fantastic sport for people with cerebral palsy. It is great fun, whether you are competing or just playing with your friends. ”



## Is there something gentler?

The greater the impact, the greater the risk of injury so low-impact is best for everyone. Some of the healthiest activities of all are very gentle - yoga, tai-chi, pilates.

Yoga, which involves placing the body in a series of postures, improves breathing, balance and flexibility and boosts energy. Tai Chi involves slow controlled movements and has similar benefits. Pilates rebalances the body through slow movement and exercises. Long-term practice can help muscle-strength. These exercises are very calming too.

## Any suggestions for older people?

Think about lower impact exercise such as walking or no impact exercise (see above). Organisations like EFDS and Age UK have done much to encourage service-providers to think about the exercise needs of older people.

“ I feel better about myself if I've managed to do some exercise. ”

Look out for senior playgrounds: exercise areas with equipment specially designed to provide low-impact exercise. Does your local authority have one yet?

Other activities popular with older people are swimming, dancing and bowls.

If you do nothing else, learn some suitable stretches - keeping as full a range of movement as possible helps maintain independence.

## What about for younger people?

Whatever you want. Of course, you will want to take specialist advice about what you can and can't do as a result of your impairment but you're still a young person.

Talk to your local authority, your local organisation for disabled people or the national organisation for people with your impairment to see if there are any specific provisions that you might be interested in.





## 4: Where do I find out more?

### Information, advice and further support

Your library or council leisure or social services department will have information about facilities, clubs and other local initiatives. You may be entitled to a pass or other discounts. Try also:

- English Federation of Disability Sport: [www.efds.co.uk](http://www.efds.co.uk)
- Sport England: [www.sportengland.org](http://www.sportengland.org)
- Find an inclusive gym: [www.efds.co.uk/inclusive\\_fitness/ifi\\_gyms](http://www.efds.co.uk/inclusive_fitness/ifi_gyms)
- Disability Rights UK's Doing Sport Differently publication: [www.disabilityrightsuk.org](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org)
- BBC: [www.bbc.co.uk/thingstodo/activities](http://www.bbc.co.uk/thingstodo/activities)
- County Sports Partnership Network (in England): [www.cspnetwork.org](http://www.cspnetwork.org)
- Parasport: [www.parasport.org.uk](http://www.parasport.org.uk)
- Sport in Mind: [www.sportinmind.org](http://www.sportinmind.org)
- NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk/livewell/disability/Pages/Disabilityhome.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/disability/Pages/Disabilityhome.aspx)

### National Disability Sports Organisations include:

- British Blind Sport: [www.britishblindsport.org.uk](http://www.britishblindsport.org.uk)
- Cerebral Palsy Sport: [www.cpsport.org](http://www.cpsport.org)
- Dwarf Sports Association UK: [www.dsauk.org](http://www.dsauk.org)
- LimbPower: [www.limbpower.com](http://www.limbpower.com)

- Mencap Sport: [www.mencap.org.uk/our-services/personal-support-services/leisure/mencap-sport](http://www.mencap.org.uk/our-services/personal-support-services/leisure/mencap-sport)
- Special Olympics GB: [www.specialolympicsgb.org.uk](http://www.specialolympicsgb.org.uk)
- UK Deaf Sport: [www.ukdeafsport.org.uk](http://www.ukdeafsport.org.uk)
- WheelPower: [www.wheelpower.org.uk](http://www.wheelpower.org.uk)

### For children and young people:

- Whizz-Kidz - disabled children's charity: [www.whizz-kidz.org.uk](http://www.whizz-kidz.org.uk)
- NDCS – National Deaf Children's Society: [www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk)
- StreetGames: [www.streetgames.org](http://www.streetgames.org)

### For older people:

- Age UK: [www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/keeping-fit](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/keeping-fit)

Try also your local organisation for disabled people or an organisation for people with your impairment.

Online networks such as Facebook could also be useful.

English Federation of Disability Sport,  
SportPark,  
Loughborough University,  
3 Oakwood Drive,  
Loughborough,  
Leicestershire LE11 3QF

**Tel** 01509 227750

**Email** [federation@efds.co.uk](mailto:federation@efds.co.uk)

**Web** [www.efds.co.uk](http://www.efds.co.uk)

**Twitter** @Eng\_Dis\_Sport

### English Federation of Disability Sport

The English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) exists to ensure that millions of disabled people can lead active lifestyles and looks to a better future where everyone can enjoy the opportunities available. EFDS is a national charity, dedicated to disabled people in sport and physical activity, supporting a wide range of organisations to include disabled people more effectively. Established in September 1998, EFDS has a vision that disabled people are active for life.

[www.efds.co.uk](http://www.efds.co.uk)

### Disability Rights UK

Disability Rights UK works to create a society where everyone with lived experience of disability or health conditions can participate equally as full citizens. They are disabled people leading change. They produce high quality information, products and services developed by and for disabled people. They partner with the private and public sector, with the aim of improving business practices.

[www.disabilityrightsuk.org](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org)

**This document is available in other formats, including a plain Word version and Easyread. Please contact [federation@efds.co.uk](mailto:federation@efds.co.uk) or call 01509 227750.**

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