Dear Alice,

I am disabled and in a wheelchair, and need to lose a lot of weight. I know I have to watch what I eat, but what kind of exercise can I do also?

Answer

Dear Reader,

More fitness options than ever are available for people with disabilities. For instance, there are groups for participating in everything from hang-gliding to wheelchair football! If you're interested in these and other pursuits, opportunities exist worldwide. Plus, getting involved in new activities may open doors you never imagined.

Before beginning an exercise program, it's vital to get the go-ahead from a health care provider. If you're taking any medications, ask your provider how they may affect your body's responses. For example, some drugs reduce sweat rate, so you may overheat more easily than the next person.

Getting involved in regular exercise is an important factor in reaching your weight control goal and improves health in many ways. Choosing activities that you enjoy will help keep you motivated to stick with your fitness program. Pick options that burn calories as well as maintain or increase muscle mass. What you're able to do or start out with will be based on your range of motion. Depending on your abilities, engaging in strength training for the upper body is important. This will help build lean muscle mass, expend more calories, and condition so that you're able to participate in other sports. To burn calories and improve cardiovascular fitness, a number of options exist. Tabletop hand bikes, which have pedals for the arms, can be used indoors, and enhance the upper body, too. Outdoor hand bikes (the wheelchair type that is used by people who don't have lower body mobility) are also used by many physically challenged athletes. Depending on your physical ability, you may also find swimming to be a great workout, both for building upper body strength as well as for burning calories.

Check your local "Y," fitness club, or recreation center for exercise classes or instruction in your area. Consulting with a trainer experienced in working with people with disabilities to help come up with an individualized program is a good idea. Here's a list of resources to find trainers and fitness groups across the country that participate in a variety of sports:

- Disabled Sports USA
Good for you for trying to make healthy changes in your life! Using any or all of the resources above can help you set and achieve your physical activity goals. Here's to success with your new endeavors!

Alice!
Category:
Nutrition & Physical Activity
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