



**SOfit**

**SPECIAL OLYMPICS  
WASHINGTON**



# Program Leader's Manual

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# Welcome!

Welcome to SOfit! Thank you for leading your team to take the steps necessary to start living a healthier, more fulfilling life.

Each lesson and activity in this program is designed to increase athletes' awareness of wellness through education and practice. This manual will serve as your guide to running the program. Review all of the materials you receive, and you should read carefully through this manual and the SOfit Curriculum Content before starting the program.

If you have a Wellness Coordinator in your area, you will be connected to that individual. The Wellness Coordinator will be your point of contact for any questions or support throughout the implementation of the program. If there is not a Wellness Coordinator in your area, you will work with the Director of Health Initiatives for any support needed while implementing the program.

## **Never hesitate to ask questions, reach out for feedback, or try new ideas!**

Each team will have different strengths, challenges, resources, and needs. While the structure of SOfit will always be the same, no two programs will be identical. Be creative, and listen to what the athletes want.

Don't forget to remind your athletes of a few things as you begin this program:

- Change does not come overnight! Habits take time to create, and therefore take time to re-create and replace. Approach wellness as a journey, with each step (decision made, action taken, goal met) being another movement along the path. These can, and should, be baby steps – goals must be attainable to be met!
- Every day is going to be different. What is easy one day (exercise, mindfulness, eating well) may be challenging the next. Always do your best, but be gentle with yourself as well.
- Be mindful of wellness as a whole. Lessons have been broken into four categories: Physical, Emotional, Nutrition and Social. This highlights the fact that wellness is more than eating well, losing weight, and exercising. All parts of wellness work together, and when one aspect is lacking in someone's life, the others are impacted. Everyone has goals that are specific and targeted to them as a unique individual.



## What is SOfit?

Special Olympics Washington's SOfit program is a Unified approach to improving health and wellness for people with and without intellectual disabilities. SOfit offers participants a comprehensive, 360 degree look at wellness. Together, athletes and Unified partners are empowered to challenge and change the way they look at diet, daily exercise and lifestyle choices.

SOfit is designed with four pillars of wellness in mind: Physical, Emotional, Social and Nutritional. The goals of SOfit are:

1. Guide individuals with and without intellectual disabilities to maintain healthier lifestyles through increased physical activity and improved daily nutrition
2. Increase participants' knowledge about physical exercise, nutrition, nutritious meal preparation and shopping for nutritious food from preprogram to postprogram
3. Allow participants to experience heightened social engagement and better emotional wellbeing as a byproduct of the inclusive nature of the program

The SOfit program is an 8-week Unified approach to wellness, which pairs athletes with a Unified Partner, with the primary goal of the program being to guide, educate and encourage athletes and partners to maintain a healthy lifestyle through increased physical activity and improved daily nutrition. Each team will have at least one Program Leader, who is committed to educating and guiding the athletes and Unified partners on their respective teams to a healthier, more active lifestyle. Program Leaders with knowledge of wellness and fitness topics is preferred, but not required.

Teams are asked to meet once a week, completing an educational topic and fitness portion. For the educational portion, Program Leaders are given a SOfit Curriculum Content guidebook to choose activities from. You can also choose to create your own educational activities! Program Leaders are encouraged to tailor the educational portion of their meetings to what their group's interests are.

At the beginning of each session, athletes and Unified Partners are asked to set goals for themselves. All participants also have health metrics tracked at the beginning and end of the program: height, weight, and blood pressure.



# Program Implementation Guidelines

## Team commitment:

- Each team must commit to running an 8-week program (minimum)
- At the beginning and end of each 8-week session, health metrics will be collected
- Program Leaders will fulfill the same requirements as coaches for any other sport – ie; background check, registration form, protective behaviors training, general orientation
- SOfit specific waiver must be completed by each participant (included on pg. 11)

## Unified:

- SOfit is a Unified Program
- Athlete- Unified Partner ratios are preferred to be 1-to-1

## Each SOfit team should receive the following items:

- Program Leader Manual
- SOfit Curriculum Content
- SOfit Playbook - 1 per athlete

## Program Parameters:

- Each meeting consists of two parts
  - Physical
    - Get up and move!
    - Program Leaders should work with their team to plan one physical activity each week
      - Go for a walk, hike, bike ride, etc.
      - Try a new work out
  - Educational
    - Choose an educational topic from one of the Four Pillars of Wellness
      - Get team input on what they want to learn
      - Adapt lessons to fit the team's needs
    - Work through lesson and activity as a group
      - Include athletes and partners in the discussion!



# SOfit Frequently Asked Questions

## **How many leaders?**

As many as needed – for contact purposes it's required to have 1 point person, or 'Program Leader.' It is best to try and keep a ratio of 10-15 participants (including UPs) for every 'leader' or coach, but that is not mandatory. Anyone can lead the program or individual sessions - coach, partner, athlete, community member, etc.

## **How long per session?**

Sessions can vary in length, though it's advised to allow at least 45-60 minutes to ensure a solid experience.

## **Education/Activity timing?**

As mentioned above, this can fluctuate with the age/attention span of the group and depth of information covered. Lessons typically take 20-45 minutes to cover, while activity should be around 30 minutes.

## **How large of teams?**

Teams are highly flexible in size, ranging from a single Athlete/Unified Partner pair to groups of 30 individuals. Program Leaders are the most familiar with their team's participants and should use their judgment on how many people are on their SOfit team.

## **Where to hold the session?**

SOfit can be held anywhere there is room/facilities for the group. Be sure there is an accessible bathroom, as well as enough room for individuals. Some ideas include: community spaces, church rooms, libraries, schools, living rooms, local gyms, etc.

## **What are the metrics?**

All participants are asked to collect and track metrics throughout their wellness journey. These include Height, Weight, Blood Pressure and Age. We use these (anonymously) to track some parts of the program, though we realize not everyone is unhealthy or has weight loss goals. Participants will also complete a lifestyle survey at the beginning and end of the program, and they will develop a personal health goal.

## **Who sees the measurements?**

No one but the group leader and SOfit manager and potentially an intern see any names included with the measurements. They get put into a password protected spreadsheet and used to generate averages for the program statewide. No names are used past the collection point.

## **What about WEIGHT?**

A participant is strongly encouraged to collect their weight and measurements, but this is not required for participation in the SOfit program. We realize some are sensitive about their numbers, and respect that choice. That said, it is confidential, and we encourage you to recognize that while a number can be considered indicative of some measure of health, it is not a judgment of who you are, or your value.



### **Is there training and support involved?**

This manual includes information on all four pillars of wellness that Program Leaders can use to be well informed prior to sessions. Your area's Wellness Coordinator will be available to support any needs you may have while implementing the program. Communication and questions are encouraged!

### **What about bringing fitness instructors or wellness experts in?**

SOfit groups are strongly encouraged to bring in professionals to help run sessions for both education and physical activity. For example, if the group wants to have a yoga experience, see if there is a local instructor to help teach it. Always best to learn from professionals, and safety must be the chief concern with movement. Likewise, if the group is doing a lesson on nutrition and want to bring a nutritionist in, please feel free! Regardless of topic, if bringing in an expert, connect with them beforehand to ensure they teach to a level that the group can learn from and take away.

### **What about money?**

SOfit is FREE! All resources and supplies needed for the program and activities are provided by SOWA.

### **Does each athlete have to have a mentor/ mentor have to have an athlete?**

A major part of the SOfit program is its unified nature; building relationships is a significant part of Wellness! We strive for a 1:1 ratio - that said, we also don't want to exclude anyone simply because they do not have a mentor. Sometimes it works well to have an athlete work with another UP/Athlete pair; other times this is not possible. The best way to think of this is that everyone should have support within the group, and take it on a case by case basis.

### **Habit coaching techniques?**

One of the best ways to identify, focus and accomplish lasting changes in wellness is to practice habit forming/coaching techniques. Simply put, start small and work toward a larger goal. For example: I want to be more socially engaged. I will start by creating a goal to identify one thing I'd like to do each week. Next, I will make it my goal to attend one thing per week. After that, I will increase the frequency until I have met my goal. I will not put myself down if I don't achieve the goal every week – instead I will adjust and keep working on it, recognizing the larger continuum of wellness and celebrating success as it comes. Every day is different than the next, so sometimes goals are much easier to accomplish, sometimes much more challenging. The important part is doing what you can and recognizing the small actions make lasting changes.



# Barriers to Participation

## Space to run the program

One of the perceived barriers to getting started with the program is to find space to run it. The size of the space needed will vary with group numbers and activities planned. As long as the group has room to discuss their chosen topics and room for the chosen fitness activity, SOfit is designed so it can be run indoors or outdoors. Teams may choose to use facilities they are already working with (or have in the past) for other sports. Also, church community rooms, parks, libraries, community education, coffee shops, and other businesses sometimes have meetings rooms for reservation/rent.

## Curriculum Challenges

Teams are encouraged to tailor the curriculum to their specific group interests, while staying allocated between the four pillars of physical, nutritional, emotional and social. In addition, identified lessons may not be deemed appropriate for some groups. Special Olympics programs and SOfit teams are encouraged to incorporate topics that are in line with their team's wants and needs.

## Transportation

Transportation can be a major barrier for participating in a program. Often athletes/mentors have their own transportation, though sometimes assistance is needed. Several teams have mentors/athlete pairs arriving together, typically with the mentor picking up their partner and dropping them back off at home.

# Risk Management

An athlete may confide personal information to you. If an athlete shares something with you – take the time to stop whatever you are doing and listen. They are reaching out to you because they trust you. It's possible that whatever happened to them (assault, abuse, etc.) has already been reported and also possible that they are sharing something that happened many years ago.

## Let them know that:

- You believe them
- You see them
- You care about them

Once you have listened and let them know that you believe them, see them, and care about them, create a plan for next steps. Let them know that you will connect with Special Olympics staff about the situation and that you will also follow up with them next time you see them.

It's not easy to share something personal and we want to make sure our athletes feel important.



# Data Collection

## Health Metrics

We will measure athletes' height, weight, and blood pressure. SOWA can provide the equipment and volunteers necessary to take these measurements at your first session of SOfit. If you have your own equipment and would like to take these measurements on your own, you are more than welcome to do so. This information will be recorded on a spreadsheet provided to you at the start of your program.

## Lifestyle Surveys

Each athlete will complete a lifestyle survey at the beginning and 8 weeks into the program. The lifestyle survey is included in this manual and will be provided to you at the start of the program.

## Personal Health Goals

During the first day of SOfit, athletes will make their own personal health goal. Athletes should make a plan to achieve their goal. Program Leaders will record each athlete's personal health goal on a spreadsheet provided to you at the start of your program.

## Attendance

Program Leaders will track attendance at each SOfit session on a spreadsheet provided to you at the start of your program.



# SOfit Implementation Checklist

## Getting Ready for SOfit

- Review Program Manual, [Register & Take SOfit Training](#)
- Review Curriculum Content
- Submit Program Outline to your Wellness Coordinator
- Distribute consent forms to athletes

## Day 1 of SOfit

- Collect Health Metrics
- Athletes set a Personal Health Goal
- Collect athlete consent forms

## Week 8\* of SOfit Program

- Collect Health Metrics
- Athletes complete the [Lifestyle Survey](#)
- Athletes report on their Personal Health Goal

\*Programs do not have to stop at 8 weeks. If your team continues participating, we will continue to collect data every 8 weeks.



ATHLETE/UNIFIED PARTNER'S PRINTED NAME:

DATE OF BIRTH



## CONSENT FORM

SOfit offers a comprehensive look at wellness and empowers and challenges athletes to change the way they look at diet, daily exercise and lifestyle choices. As a participant in the SOfit program, the following athlete information will be collected: name, gender, date of birth, height, weight, Body Mass Index (BMI), blood pressure and various body measurements. These metrics together with nutrition and exercise data will be tracked during the eight week SOfit program.

### AUTHORIZATION FROM ATHLETE OR LEGAL GUARDIAN:

I authorize the participation of the athlete listed below in the SOfit Program. I understand that participation in the SOfit Program is voluntary and that authorization can be withdrawn at any time without penalty and that participation in SOfit is not a requirement for participating in other Special Olympics activities. I understand that the provision of these health services is not intended as a substitute or alternative to regular care that has been received in the past or that may be recommended in the future. I understand that I should consult a licensed physician prior to starting SOfit or any exercise regimen. I understand that information that is gathered as part of the assessment process may be used in group form (anonymously) to assess and communicate the overall health needs of athletes and to develop programs to address those needs. I understand that information that is gathered as part of the SOfit program will be used by coaches and administrative personnel to track activity and progress. The athlete's SOfit information will be stored on a password protected website for coaches to access and log athlete activity. I authorize the disclosure of my information and assessment results from coaches and volunteer health care providers to the coaches and administrative personnel involved in the SOfit program.

ATHLETE/UNIFIED PARTNER'S PRINTED NAME:

DATE OF BIRTH

SPECIAL OLYMPICS DELEGATION: \_\_\_\_\_



SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN

DATE



SIGNATURE OF ATHLETE/UNIFIED PARTNER

DATE

**NOTE:** This authorization shall remain effective unless the consenting party requests termination of the consent or the scope of the SOfit programs change materially.



# My Personal Health Goal

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**My Personal Health Goal is:**

**To reach my goal, I will do these things:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**I will know I have reached my goal when:**

## **SMART Goal Checklist:**

- Specific** - is it clear what action I have to take?
- Measurable** - will I be able to track my progress?
- Attainable** - can I see myself achieving this goal?
- Relevant** - is this goal important to me?
- Time-Bound** - when will my goal be achieved?



# Lifestyle Survey: Fitness & Wellness Programs

For Program Leaders



Special Olympics  
Washington  
**Health**



Scan to access  
online survey

Team Name	
Area	
Fitness Program	
Sport	
Sport Season	
Program Leader Name	
Final # of Participants	

Survey Questions	
1	<p><b>Role</b> <i>(A=Athlete, CAR=Caregiver, CO=Coach, P=Parent, UP=Unified Partner)</i></p>
2	<p><b>Race/Ethnicity</b> <i>(AI=American Indian/Alaskan Native, AA=Asian American, B=Black/African American, H=Hispanic/Latinx, PI=Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, W=White/Caucasian, Blank=Prefer not to answer)</i></p>
3	<p><b>T-Shirt Size</b> <i>(XS, S, M, L, XL, 2XL, 3XL, 4XL)</i></p>
4	<p><b>Nutrition</b> After participating in this program, I can make healthier choices about nutrition <i>(True, False, Unsure)</i></p>
5	<p><b>Hydration</b> After participating in this program, I can make healthier choices about hydration <i>(True, False, Unsure)</i></p>
6	<p><b>Exercise</b> After participating in this program, I can make healthier choices about exercise <i>(True, False, Unsure)</i></p>
7	<p><b>Mental Health</b> After participating in this program, I feel better about my mental health <i>(True, False, Unsure)</i></p>
8	<p><b>Goals</b> This program helped me achieve my health goal <i>(True, False, Unsure)</i></p>
9	<p>What was your favorite part about participating in this program?</p>
10	<p>Did you notice any positive changes in your health after participating in this program? Please share!</p>
11	<p>Do you have any suggestions to help us improve this program?</p>

	<b>Athlete Name</b>					
1	<b>Role</b>					
2	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>					
3	<b>T-Shirt Size</b>					
4	<b>Nutrition</b>					
5	<b>Hydration</b>					
6	<b>Exercise</b>					
7	<b>Mental Health</b>					
8	<b>Goals</b>					
9	<b>What was your favorite part about participating in this program?</b>					
10	<b>Did you notice any positive changes in your health after participating in this program? Please share!</b>					
11	<b>Do you have any suggestions to help us improve this program?</b>					



# Certificate of Completion

PRESENTED TO:

\_\_\_\_\_

For successful completion of the Sofit Program of Special Olympics Washington

## Congratulations!

\_\_\_\_\_

*Jella Norton*

Director of Health Programs

\_\_\_\_\_

Program Leader



## Program Leader Information

*"I have always received far more than I have ever given.  
The spirit of Special Olympics is in the eyes and hearts  
of the athletes and amazing volunteers."  
-Linda Hines, SOMN Coach*

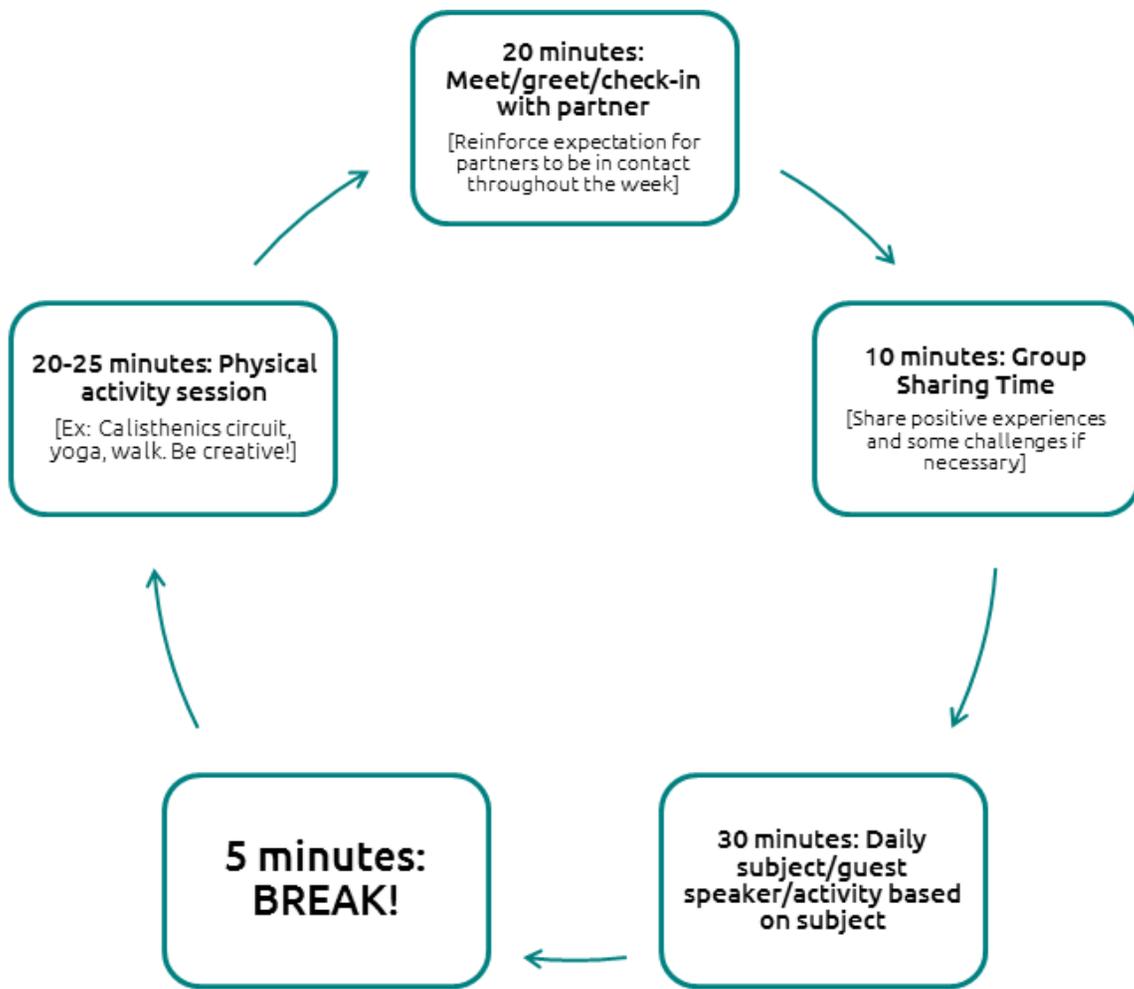
## Suggested Team Meeting Format

The team meeting format will look different for each and every team that participates in SOfit. Learning takes place best within a respectful, comfortable, structured environment where expectations are clearly known, but the length of class, as well as structure, can vary. Each class must include these elements of wellness:

- An educational component
- A movement-based activity

It is essential to outline and time out each meeting to ensure the correct amount of information can be covered while leaving time for relaxed, positive, productive discussion around the topic. The outline below is a guideline for a 90-minute class, though each group will vary to their unique needs.

### 90-Minute Class Model:





## Nutritional Wellness

*"Just like keeping a healthy diet is important to maintaining a healthy lifestyle, eating the right foods is just as important for getting the most out of your workout."  
-Marcus Samuelsson, Chef*

## Nutritional Wellness Introduction

One of the most neglected aspects of health is nutrition! What we put into our bodies in the form of food and drink is essential. In fact, many people use the phrase, “you can’t out-exercise a bad diet.” It can seem very challenging to eat and drink in a way that supports a healthy lifestyle. Anyone can do it, provided they have a clear understanding of, and access to, what makes food and drink healthy.

It is a common misconception that food has to be “low fat” or “low calorie” to be healthy. Often, these are the foods that have additives in them that are less than healthy for a human body! Also, nutrition goes far beyond avoiding food and beverages that will make a person overweight. An equally important aspect is making sure what is put into our bodies is nutrient rich/dense, as well.

Lessons within the Nutritional Wellness pillar will be addressed from several angles. For instance, some lessons discuss food myths, nutrient density, and important things to watch out for, as well as tips and ‘tricks’ to changing habits to become healthier.





## Social Wellness

*"Nothing is impossible,  
The word itself says  
"I'm possible."  
-Audrey Hepburn*

## Social Wellness Introduction



Being social means spending time in large or small groups and often includes forming relationships with people in the groups. These relationships can take many forms, all of which have different meaning to us.

Relationships are a very important part of a person's life. Who we decide to spend time with can influence our choices, behavior, and opportunities on a daily basis! All parts of wellness work together, especially when it comes to relationships.

Having good, healthy relationships is important, not only for support and guidance, but also to have fun! It is beneficial to spend time with people who are positive influences and build an individual up. These relationships can reduce stress, increase healthy hormones, and regulate all kinds of good processes in the body. Fun people can be valuable fitness and activity partners as well – having fun while being active is a wellness “home run!”

In this section, the lessons outline what a healthy relationship feels like, red flags to watch out for, different kinds of relationships and the benefits of healthy relationships.

Remember - while wellness is ultimately a person's own responsibility, the people an individual chooses to keep close to them can help or hinder the journey – make good decisions!



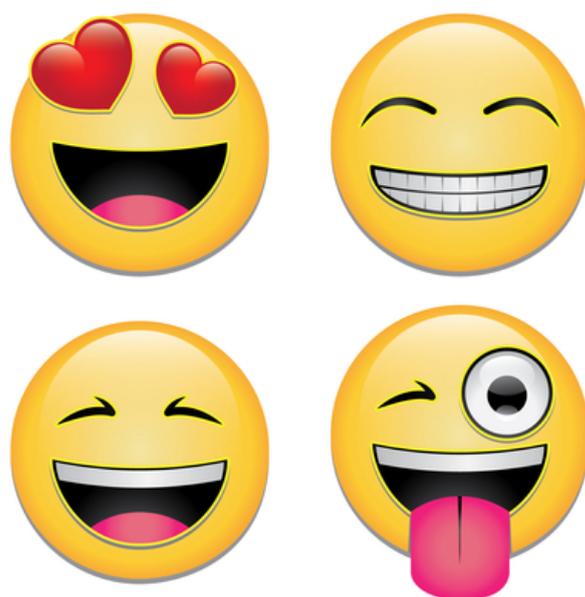


## Emotional Wellness

*"Your own mind is a sacred enclosure into which nothing harmful can enter, except by your permission."  
-Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## Emotional Wellness Introduction

All aspects of wellness work together to form a healthy lifestyle. Emotional Wellness is no exception, but is often misunderstood, overlooked, or neglected, since it can be more challenging to work with.



### Emotional Wellness is Important for Many Reasons, Including:

- **Stress levels** – stress affects everything we do on a daily basis and is part of a cyclical relationship with an individual’s environment – sometimes stress can cause stress!
- **Stability** – emotional stability is paramount when starting on a new health and wellness plan. That said, having a strong plan and support can help lead to emotional stability.
- **Thought processes** – being emotionally well will affect thought process – ‘thinking clearly’ is a positive symptom of being in a good place emotionally.

The above examples are by no means a comprehensive view of what Emotional Wellness encompasses, but hopefully gets minds working in the right direction. Everything in a person’s life revolves around decisions made in the environment; food and beverages consumed, level of activity, and relationships made and maintained all are crucial to health. Being in a good place emotionally is the basis for sound choices.





## Physical Wellness

*"Some people want it to happen,  
some people wish it to happen,  
others make it happen."  
-Michael Jordan*

# Physical Fitness Introduction

An important aspect of wellness is being able to move with strength and purpose! Make sure your physician has cleared you for exercise prior to beginning any program.

The intent of this section of the SOfit guide is to open participants' minds to various kinds of movement ! Please take this and use it in everyday life, outside of SOfit class, and as a reference. Be creative and have fun!

Movement doesn't have to be boot camp style training to become strong and healthy – find movements you enjoy and perform them with quality.

It is important to note - whenever possible, work with a professional trainer or movement coach to ensure proper body mechanics and safety in exercise. Even if a person is getting healthier, it is possible to get hurt if movements are performed incorrectly.

If at any point pain is experienced (outside of fatigue), please stop immediately and figure out what happened. Go to a doctor if pain persists or is severe.

## Any movement/strength plan should have the following components:

- **Push** – such as a pushup, overhead press, handstand
- **Pull** – rowing, pullups
- **Hinge** – deadlifting, kettlebell swings
- **Squat** – lunges, squats (all variations)
- **Carry** – picking something up with good form (usually fairly heavy), carrying it a distance and returning it to the ground.
  - Be sure these movements are performed equally on both sides.

Again, find movements within these categories you enjoy, and perform those! With all the amazing things a human body can do, you can probably find something that feels good. A healthy plan includes strength training the above categories two – three times per week, as well as being active every day.





## Injury Prevention

*"Mobility, purposeful movement patterns, and strength are key in reducing the risk of injury in sports, exercise and life."*

*-Ben Swarts*

# Injury Prevention

## Prevalence and Physical Symptoms of Common Intellectual Disabilities

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 0.9% of students ages 3-21 have a disability qualified under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). Nationally, 1-3% of Americans are diagnosed with an intellectual disability, with 11.6% of these individuals between the ages of 18-64. Additionally, statistics have shown that males are twice as more likely than females to have a developmental disability in association with their intellectual disability. Among these individuals, the most common disabilities are Down syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome, Jacob's Syndrome and Williams Syndrome. These intellectual disabilities are typically accompanied by physical symptoms or side-effects including:

- Decreased muscle tone in Down syndrome.
- Flexible joints and flat feet in Fragile X Syndrome.
- Arthritis, impaired joint mobility and swollen and stiff joints in Jacob's Syndrome.
- Obesity, gastrointestinal difficulties and hypertension in Williams Syndrome.

As athletes, it is crucial to know the physical symptoms of your disability or disorder in order to conduct appropriate exercises that help in preventing injury and protecting your body. For instance, adults with a disability are three times more likely to develop heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. In contrast to health awareness, almost half of individuals with disabilities do not perform aerobic physical activity – a leading prevention to chronic diseases. As Special Olympics athletes and participants of SOFit, you are already one step closer to being a healthier and more active individual! For any athlete, knowledge of health conditions is a necessity in continuing their passion for physical activity and preventing injuries that they are at risk for.

It is essential to consult a physician before beginning any exercise routine. By consulting a physician, you are able to understand the side-effects associated with medications being taken and are able to be cautious when performing any physical activity. For example, Lithium Carbonate is a medication commonly used in the treatment of Fragile X Syndrome and can cause muscle weakness. Also, Amino Acid supplements used in children with Down syndrome cause hypoglycemia (low blood sugar levels). The physicians are able to give appropriate recommendations on how to tailor your daily exercise routine for your specific skill abilities as well as side-effects from medication.

The following section will provide a summary of injuries athletes are at a greater risk for as well as a guideline to daily routines in stretching, strengthening and nutrition that will help prevent such injuries.



## Athletic Injury Prevalence

As individuals who are physically active, the risk of injury increases more than an inactive individual. The three groups of people that are more prone to sports injuries include children and adolescents, adults and women.

- **Adolescents** - Children are more at risk for sports injuries because their bodies are still in the growth phase of life and are not as stable as adult muscles and bones. Particularly, bruises or sprains may be potentially harmful in children if they involve growth plates. A ligament or muscle tear may cause a bone fracture in a child. Also, repetitive motions are one way to cause stress fractures or tendinitis (painful inflammation of tendons). Furthermore, young athletes are at higher risk of spinal cord and neck injuries in contact sports.
- **Adults** – As adults, the same issues in adolescence may arise due to weaker muscles or slower movements. Additionally, the movement from a sedentary to active lifestyle puts adults at greater risk of injury because their bodies are not conditioned for the strain of physical activity.
- **Women** – Females’ risk of injury are tailored more to the sport they are participating in. For example, female basketball players have been shown to be six times more at risk for ACL injuries than their male counterparts. The risk of injury in women is substantially higher than men because of their genetic makeup including musculature, bone structure and hormone levels.

The importance of knowing and understanding the causes of specific sport injuries allows the tailoring of prevention programs and exercise routines. Athletes are physically active because they enjoy an active lifestyle! Helping prevent sports injuries increases the amount of activity performed and thus creates a happy, healthy athlete!

## Daily Prevention Measures to Avoid Injury:

### General:

Studies have shown that a warm-up routine significantly reduces injuries to knees and ankles in youth athletes. Additionally, the use of resistance training not only decreased the risk of injury, but performance level, cognitive functioning, and cardiovascular health benefited as well. Resistance training has also proven to improve symptoms of arthritis or fibromyalgia – two conditions that often are associated with Jacob’s syndrome.

When beginning a prevention routine, start small. For instance, it is simple to incorporate additional physical activity into your daily routine without even taking more time out of your schedule! Consider taking the stairs instead of the elevator, walking around the block during a lunch break, or parking farther away from the office building.

Now let’s get down to the nitty-gritty exercise! When creating your own prevention exercise routine there are a few things that need to be thought about first. Factors that go into building an exercise routine include frequency, duration, specificity, intensity and progression. These routines are tailored to individual goals and how frequently you have time to train! For example, individuals with disabilities are seen to have particular difficulty with balance and it is suggested that your daily routine include exercises to strengthen core muscles. When progressing through your daily prevention routines, keep in mind to continually challenge yourself! If an exercise or stretch is becoming easy for you, look to increase the difficulty. These progressions may include upgrading to a more difficult stretch, adding weight to a strengthening exercise, or performing a few more repetitions than normal. Be creative and listen to your body! The movement guide in the manual is an excellent place to look for exercises.



In general, for any individual, doctors recommend at least two and a half hours of moderate activity a week. What activities do you enjoy? Have you learned any fun exercises from Special Olympics? Go ahead and grab some friends and be physically active together! Keep in mind that you or your friends may have certain physical barriers for particular activities. Do not let that deter you! There are plenty of activities out there for everyone to be physically active and have fun. The following sections will provide suggestions and information on how to structure an injury prevention program through stretching, strengthening and nutrition.

### **Stretching:**

Stretching is one of the main ways that you can increase your flexibility and thus increase the range of motion of your joints. An increase in flexibility and joint range of motion can help reduce the risk of activity-based injuries. Further, stretching can help increase blood flow to your muscles. Essentially, stretching can help your muscles work more effectively! The following are some guidelines to keep in mind when creating a stretching routine:

- Stretch major muscle groups – calves, thighs, hips, low back, neck and shoulders.
- When stretching, don't bounce. Bouncing while stretching is an easy way to injure yourself and that is exactly what you're trying to avoid!
- Instead of bouncing, hold the stretching position for 30-60 seconds.
- If it is painful to stretch a certain muscle group, refrain from stretching those muscles. When stretching there should be tension, but not enough to cause pain. As you progressively become more flexible, the stretching position will automatically become more advanced.
- It may be beneficial to tailor your stretches to the sport that you participate in. For instance, if you play soccer, hamstring stretches are very beneficial. Ask your coach what stretches may be helpful in the sport or activity that you are involved with!

The recommended amount of stretching, according to American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), is a minimum of two times per week. Static stretching, when the exercise is held in one position for 30-60 seconds, is beneficial on a daily basis or after exercise. However, static stretching is not necessary to include in a warm-up routine. Instead, dynamic stretching, that is moving while stretching a muscle group, is recommended to incorporate in a warm-up prior to exercise. Dynamic stretches include walking lunges, high steps, butt kicks or leg swings.



*(Keep in mind to consult a physician prior to starting any stretching program. Individuals with Down syndrome may want to avoid stretching due to hyper-mobile and joint laxity.)*

## Strengthening:

It's recommended that individuals perform a minimum of 60 minutes of physical activity daily or two and a half hours a week. Incorporated into this time should be **three** forms of activity: aerobic exercise, muscle strengthening and bone strengthening. Aerobic physical activity includes brisk walking or running. Muscle strengthening exercises range from sit-ups or push-ups to strength-based activities such as gymnastics. Bone strengthening exercises include jumping rope or running.

Important aspects of a strengthening program include consistency and involvement of friends! Studies show that improvement in muscle strength decreases the risk of injury in muscle groups and associated muscles. Further, participating in group exercise programs makes the individual more accountable and thus results in more consistent performance. Some guidelines to follow when creating and conducting a strength program are:

- Control the weight used for each exercise. Use the weight that challenges your body and gradually progress to heavier weights as the exercise becomes less difficult.
- Make sure to breathe when performing the exercise! The rule of thumb is to breathe in when the weight is being lowered and breathe out when the weight is being lifted.
  - For example, during a biceps curl, breathe in when curling your arm and breathe out when lowering your arm.
- Progress is slow and steady. Be patient! When an exercise is becoming easy, add weight or perform more repetitions. Listen to your body and don't exceed its limitations just to add heavier weight.
- Have variation! It is good to have a consistent exercise and stretching routine, but it is also good to step outside the box and attend group exercise sessions every now and again. Keep your body guessing!

The following are suggestions of strengthening exercises to incorporate into a daily or weekly exercise routine for each recommended muscle group. For each muscle group, perform each exercise **four** times for 10-15 repetitions (per leg or arm) each. Rest between each set for 30-60 seconds.

- **Balance** - Some simple balance exercises that can be done throughout your daily routine include:
  - **Shifting weight.** If you're standing for long periods of time, shift your weight from one foot to the other!
  - **Standing on one leg.** Again, if you're standing for a couple minutes, stand on one leg for 20 seconds and then switch to the other leg for 20 seconds.
  - **Refer to the Fitness Guide**, which provides descriptions and pictures of additional balance exercises.
- **Calves** – Simple calf raises are awesome! To make calf raises more challenging, hold weights while performing the exercise, turn your toes inward or outward, or use a stair step.
- **Thighs - Quadriceps (front of thighs)** - Stationary forward lunges. Another quadriceps exercise is step-ups. Step up onto a stair and use the pattern "up-up-down-down." To make either exercise more challenging, hold weights while performing the exercise.



- **Hamstrings (back of thighs)** - Standing behind a chair for stability, slightly bend one leg. With the other leg, keep your foot flexed and curl your leg, raising your heel to your butt. Repeat for both legs. For a more challenging alternative, lie on your stomach with an ankle weight or hold a weight with your feet. In this position, perform a leg curl. If using ankle weights, do single-leg curls and repeat for both legs.
- **Hips** – A great exercise for your hips, legs and glutes is a body squat.
- **Shoulders** – A great upper body exercise that works your shoulders, chest and arms is a push-up. Variations to this exercise include against a wall, bed/counter, or on your knees.
- **Low back/glutes** – To work your gluteal and low back muscles, performing a “superman” exercise is perfect! To make the exercise easier, raise one arm (R) with one leg (L) and alternate opposite arm/leg.
- **Core** – An exercise that works all muscles in your abdomen is a plank! This exercise has multiple variations as well. To begin, stand on hands and knees. A variation is to move from your hands to your forearms with hip extension greater than 90°. Another alternative is high and low planks.

Keep in mind there are many educational lessons that provide alternatives and more information on strength exercises!

## Nutrition:

The food that you eat on a day-to-day basis is very important in growing and maintaining strong muscles and bones! All of your meals should include carbohydrates, proteins and healthy fats. Protein should be the largest portion, then carbohydrates, followed by healthy fats with the smallest portion.

### Suggestions on healthy proteins include:

- Fish
- Chicken
- Lean turkey
- Lean beef

### Suggestions on healthy carbohydrates include:

- Whole grain brown rice
- Sweet potatoes
- Whole wheat pasta

### Suggestions on healthy fats include:

- Avocado
- Almonds
- Cooking with coconut oil or olive oil



A phrase that you might have heard is, “everything in moderation.” That’s absolutely correct! Check the portion sizes for what you’re eating and stick to them. For example, many serving sizes of pasta are only a ¼ or ½ cup. For more information on portion control or more specific details on nutrition, there are plenty of Nutritional Wellness lessons!

As athletes, nutrition and the food you eat is crucial for performance! Eating unhealthy foods can affect your performance and may be detrimental to your body in physical and physiological ways. Additionally, it is essential to keep hydrated. It’s recommended an athlete drink 16 ounces of fluid



(preferably water) two hours prior to exercise and drink water frequently throughout the workout. Further, it is suggested to become conscious of your weight prior to and after exercise as you should drink 16 to 24 ounces of water for every pound that was lost.

**The following includes guidelines to alter your daily eating habits to become a healthier athlete:**

- Instead of drinking soda or fruity drinks with your meals, substitute water!
- When drinking coffee, beware of the drinks that contain extra additives.
  - For example, instead of ordering a caramel macchiato with whipped cream and caramel sauce, try a simple coffee with non-fat milk or a skinny latte.
- When cooking, try to use healthier oils such as coconut or olive oil and avoid using heavy amounts of butter or cream.
- Snacks are good! Grab a low-fat yogurt in your favorite flavor or munch on some fruits and vegetables. Step up these healthy snacks with a few almonds or some peanut butter!
- Stay away from processed foods. Foods should be fresh and have an expiration date within a couple weeks.
- Everything in moderation! It's okay to have a few sweets after dinner a couple times a week. The key here is to only have one small serving and not multiple servings!
- Specifically for individuals with diabetes - keep track of your blood glucose level before and after exercise to make sure you are tailoring your fluid intake appropriately.

**The Take-Away:**

This prevention section is to help athletes become aware of the issues that this population faces and to help combat such issues. Prevention measures are a great asset to your exercises or physical activity to decrease injury and be able to participate as much as possible. The educational lessons in Physical and Nutritional Wellness are helpful in becoming a healthy athlete and will also aid in prevention measures. Don't be afraid to consult your coach or fitness instructor to learn about alternatives in stretching and strengthening exercises, as well as learn sport-specific exercises that can help with performance. Finally, always consult a physician prior to beginning physical activity to make sure that you are aware of any risks or health-related issues that you may have.

**A Note for Coaches:**

Not only should athletes be aware of the injuries associated with sports and intellectual disabilities, but coaches should be as well. The coach's role is to help improve athletes' skills so that they prevent injury. This prevention section can help coaches to format and incorporate a dynamic warm-up before practices and games and static stretching after activity. Also, coaches are able to use this prevention section as a guide and tailor exercises and/or stretches to their specific sports. Finally, with the knowledge of stretching and strengthening exercises and nutrition, coaches should be advocates for a healthy active lifestyle and encourage their athletes to become healthy.



Program Leaders are always encouraged to provide feedback, ask questions, and propose new ideas! Don't hesitate to reach out to your Wellness Coordinator at any time.

If you have any questions about the SOfit program, you should contact your Wellness Coordinator first. Further questions or comments can be sent to [fitness@sowa.org](mailto:fitness@sowa.org).

**Thank you for providing athletes with opportunities to improve their health and quality of life. Have fun!**



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