

# Therapeutic Recreation Therapy

The Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (TRS) is responsible for addressing leisure participation. Upon admission, he or she will meet with you and complete an in-depth leisure inventory. The Therapeutic Recreation Specialist will focus on three areas:

**Therapy** using activities to improve functional skills (muscle strength, balance, coordination, flexibility and mobility) that are necessary for participation in other leisure interests. You will learn new skills and modify old ones to compensate for abilities you've lost. You will also have the opportunity to use adaptive equipment for recreation participation as necessary.

**Leisure education** the TRS will discuss old and potentially new leisure interests with you. Together you will explore leisure options: activities, adapted equipment/modifications, resources and programs. Opportunity will be provided to view videos on adapted recreation with follow up discussion and written information to take home. Information provided will enable you to actively pursue leisure interests in your community environment upon discharge.

**Recreation participation** you are encouraged to actively participate in leisure activities in therapy, in the recreation area on the unit, and in the community. As you acquire skills, they will continue to work towards independent initiation of participation in leisure activities with adaptive equipment/modifications as necessary. Participation in community reintegration sessions help you gain confidence in using skills recently learned in therapies in a community environment with support from the staff.

The overall goal is to provide skills, knowledge, and resources to decrease the amount of assistance needed from others and to increase your level of independence in leisure activities and in the community.

## Why is participation in recreation activities important?

**Stress reduction** Reducing stress can improve physical and mental well-being.

**Overall well-being** People with spinal cord injuries who participate in active recreational activities have fewer SCI-related health problems, such as skin breakdown.

**Social contacts** Participation in community based and group activities can help a person with a spinal cord injury overcome feelings of social isolation and self-consciousness.

**Increased endurance** Participation in active recreational activities increase your cardiovascular endurance, which can give you more energy for returning to work or school.

**Skill development** Participation in recreational activities can enhance skills, such as fine motor use and sitting balance, which are used in other areas of life, such as dressing.

**Increase confidence and self-esteem** Independence in recreational activities can increase independence in other activities.

**Strengthen interpersonal skills** Communication skills, such as assertiveness, can be practiced in the non-threatening environment of recreational activities.

**Community re-integration** Independence in mobility and social interaction, which can be achieved through recreation participation, leads to increased self confidence and self reliance.

### What recreational activities are available to me?

Recreational activities can be divided into four classifications: high risk/high adventure, active, leisure, and passive.

**High risk/High adventure** These activities exist, but in limited areas. These activities are geared to increasing self-confidence and self-esteem, independent functioning, and strength/endurance.

- white water rafting
- hang gliding
- mountain climbing/rappelling
- wilderness trips
- skydiving

**Active** These activities increase strength, endurance, motor functioning, self-confidence, and help reduce stress.

- team sports (i.e., basketball, softball)
- gardening/horticulture
- skiing (water and snow)
- travel/sightseeing
- weight lifting
- hunting/target shooting
- martial arts
- track and field
- bowling
- golf
- archery
- aerobics
- swimming

**Leisure** These activities increase endurance, fine motor functioning, self-confidence, and help reduce stress. They also increase social contacts in a non-competitive setting. They differ from ACTIVE activities in that they do not require the physical strength and stamina for successful participation.

- Civic clubs/church
- Singing/playing instruments
- Attending movies/concerts
- Dining out
- Volunteering
- Shopping
- Fishing
- Camping
- Cooking
- Dancing

**Passive** These activities help to reduce stress and increase fine motor functioning.

- Reading
- Table games
- Crafts
- Writing

- Watching movies/TV at home
- Computer/video games

Participation in LEISURE and ACTIVE activities will increase your overall strength and endurance. Participation in ACTIVE activities will also decrease your risk of skin breakdown, blood clots, high blood pressure, and contractures.

### **Are there any recreational activities that I cannot participate in?**

Practically every known sport or leisure activity has been adapted for people with spinal cord injuries. Risk factors related to participation are limited, but important. Also remember, if an activity did not appeal to you before your injury, it may not appeal to you now, but don't be afraid to try something new.

"I'm involved in horseback riding now. It's a whole new life for me. It helps me work on my balance because the horse simulates walking. My leg muscles seem to be getting stronger and I have less swelling in my feet."

*George B., 40-year old T - 10 paraplegic*

### **Risk Factors**

- If you are within six months of your spinal cord injury surgery, do not participate in activities which involve excessive stretching or twisting (such as skiing or bowling).
- If you are within six months of your spinal cord injury surgery, do not participate in contact sports (such as basketball).
- If you had placement of rods during your spinal cord injury surgery, you may also be restricted from participating in HIGH RISK or ACTIVE activities for approximately six months to one year.
- Wait approximately six months before riding amusement park rides. Be aware of warnings placed on rides for people with back injuries.
- Wait six months before firing a gun or rifle.
- Wait six months before riding a horse

Remember to protect your skin, no matter what activity you are participating in. Your physician, nurse specialist, or recreational therapist can talk to you about any specific questions you may have.

### **I'm too old to participate in some of these activities**

You're never too old. If you are over the age of 50 and have an interest in competition sports, you can compete in the MASTERS level. Competition includes archery, air weapons, and some track/field.

Recreational participation, even if it is swimming three times a week, dining out once a week, or attending monthly club meeting is as important to you as it is to a non-spinal cord injured person. Older adults who stay active have fewer age-related health problems, experience less social isolation, and maintain mental alertness longer than those who rarely participate.