Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines

FOR ADULTS WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Key Messages

The Guidelines are the first rigorously developed guidelines for prescribing and developing exercise programs for adults living with multiple sclerosis (MS).

The new Guidelines are evidence-based. They are based on systematic reviews of the best available evidence. They were developed by experts and reviewed by health and fitness professionals and Canadians living with MS.

Who are the Guidelines for?

These guidelines are appropriate for adults (aged 18-64 years) with minimal to moderate disability resulting from either relapsing, remitting or progressive forms of MS.

Who should use the Guidelines?

People living with MS, their families, health care professionals and organizations that promote exercise or serve adults with MS may use these guidelines as a tool for making exercise recommendations or developing exercise programs.

Why were the Guidelines developed?

The Guidelines were developed to provide a basis for exercise prescription, target goals for promoting physical activity and serve as a benchmark for monitoring activity levels among individuals with MS.

The Guidelines address a significant gap in informational resources about exercise available for individuals with MS as well as healthcare professionals, and provide a foundation for program and policy development.

What will the Guidelines tell me?

The Guidelines outline how a person with MS can include safe, appropriate and effective physical activity in their daily routine. They also provide a reference to what are appropriate physical activity levels.

Specifically, the Guidelines provide the minimum frequency, intensity, duration and type of physical activity necessary for improved fitness, mobility, among adults with MS.

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Where can I find the Guidelines?

The guidelines are available on the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) and MS Society of Canada websites.
www.csep.ca/guidelines
www.mssociety.ca

How will the Guidelines help adults with MS?

Following the Guidelines can improve aspects of fitness related to aerobic endurance and muscle strength. Improved fitness is especially important for people with MS for whom rates of inactivity are high and deconditioning is common.

Meeting these guidelines may also reduce fatigue, improve mobility and enhance elements of health related quality of life. Experts agree that currently there is no scientific evidence that following these guidelines will result in relapse of MS symptoms or worsen fatigue or health related quality of life. The potential benefits exceed the potential risks associated with physical activity.

What if I am unable to meet all of the Guidelines?

For those who are currently physically inactive, activities performed at a lower intensity, frequency and duration than recommended may bring some benefit. It is appropriate for inactive adults to gradually increase duration, frequency, and intensity as a progression towards meeting the guidelines.

While participating in either aerobic activity or strength training will yield some specific fitness benefits, participating in both types of activity will yield a broader range of fitness benefits.

Who created the Guidelines and how were they created?

The Guidelines were developed using a rigorous process that is considered the international standard for guideline development. First, researchers conducted a systematic review of relevant literature related to MS and exercise. A consensus panel met to review the research evidence. This panel included researchers with expertise specifically related to exercise and MS along with key stakeholders including health care professionals and service providers. The consensus panel discussed the reviewed evidence and developed a guideline based on the evidence. The newly developed Guidelines were circulated to over 300 health and fitness professionals and people living with MS for feedback. The Guidelines were revised based on the feedback and finally approved by the members of the consensus panel.

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Who is releasing the Guidelines?

The Canadian Society of Exercise Physiology is releasing the Guidelines in partnership with the MS Society of Canada.

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) were involved in the funding of the development process.

The Canadian Society of Exercise Physiology is releasing the Guidelines in partnership with the MS Society of Canada and ParticipACTION.

How do these guidelines differ from the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults aged 18-64 years and other population - specific guidelines?

The Guidelines for Adults with MS recommend a dose that is lower than the amount suggested for the general population (150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity aerobic activity each week, and muscle and bone strengthening training 2 times per week). This variation is a function of differences in a) the evidence used to inform the current guidelines and b) the lower basal fitness levels of adults with MS. Thus, individuals with MS are likely to experience improvements in fitness from a smaller dose of exercise than adults in the general population.

The Guidelines also differ from those recommended for adults with spinal cord injury. The recommended dose of physical activity for adults with MS is greater in duration yet lower in intensity than that recommended for adults with spinal cord injury. Again, these differences reflect differences in the evidence base informing each specific guideline.

What about surveillance and monitoring?

The physical activity patterns of adults with MS have not previously been monitored. However, with the development of the new guidelines, activity levels of individuals with MS can now be assessed by the North American Committee on MS (NARCOMS) which currently monitors disease management activities related to multiple sclerosis.