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EXERCISES FOR PEOPLE IN WHEELCHAIRS

Apr 29, 2012 | By [Jae Ireland](#)

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Spinal cord injuries resulting in paralysis of some type affect more than 250,000 people in the United States, according to the National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center. This can mean long-term confinement to a wheelchair, and create challenges to maintaining physical fitness levels. Even if you are only confined to a wheelchair for a short amount of time, you can still exercise to keep your muscles strong and your endurance high. As long as your doctor gives you the OK, wheelchair exercises can be fulfilling and beneficial.

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WARM-UP

Just like regular exercise, you should warm up before you begin doing wheelchair exercises. This is especially important for those who have muscles that have been inactive for a long period of time. Your physical therapist can help you stretch, or you can stretch your arms overhead, and then stretch them by using one arm to pull the other arm close to the body. The University of Iowa cautions that wheelchair athletes are susceptible to arm injuries and tendinitis, so stretching is an important way to start your workout.

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RESISTANCE BANDS

Resistance bands can be an effective way to carry out strength training from your wheelchair. Resistance bands are small and flexible, and can be attached to your wheelchair for ease, portability and convenience. Attach two resistance bands and use them to complete bicep curls; grasp the handles, and curl your fist up to touch your bicep. Or, cross your arm to the opposite shoulder with the resistance band attached at shoulder level.

CARDIO WORKOUT

Just because you're confined to a wheelchair doesn't mean you can't raise your heart rate through cardiovascular exercise. Try a wheelchair sport offered through your rehabilitation clinic or city recreational program; ask your physical therapist about available sports and programs. Wheelchair basketball is popular and can help you work up a sweat. Going for a spin around the track in your wheelchair can raise your heart rate and provide a good workout for your arms.

STRENGTH TRAINING

Strength training with dumbbells or using your own body weight can be an effective way to exercise, notes Disabled-World.com. Try using food cans as weights. The website suggests working up to doing three sets of 12 repetitions of lifting free weights. You might also try catching and throwing a small medicine ball, or doing wheelchair push-ups, where you plant your hands on either side of your bottom and attempt to lift your body weight off the seat of the wheelchair.

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COOL DOWN

Don't forget to cool down after finishing your wheelchair exercises. You'll need to stretch your arms once again, raising them over your head and interlocking your fingers. Stretch your shoulders back so your shoulder blades come closer together and roll your wrists. Finally, finish your workout with some deep breathing and meditation.

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REFERENCES

- NSCISC: Spinal Cord Injury Facts and Figures at a Glance
- University of Iowa: Quick Guide to Aerobic Exercise for People Who Use Wheelchairs
- Disabled World: Wheelchair Exercises and Fitness

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