

With the pandemic limiting our access to various recreation programs and services, it can be challenging for those living with Huntington disease (HD) and their care partners to keep active, be social and engage in activities. Engaging in meaningful, voluntary and chosen activities for our leisure time can have positive impacts on our health and well-being. Studies have shown that engaging in leisure can help build resiliency, extend independence and find joy in life.

Physical Activities

Physical activity is good for our hearts as well as our moods; it can also contribute to a good night's sleep. Before starting a new physical activity, it is important to speak with your doctor first. The Canadian Society of Exercise Physiology (CSEP) provides general guidelines:

- 150 minutes of aerobic activity a week (this can be in 10-minute increments!)
- Strength training two times per week with a rest in between
- Balance activities: one of the best exercises for balance is Tai Chi; yoga is also an excellent activity for balance as well as strengthening

Safety while exercising is key to preventing injury:

- Many exercises can be done in a seated position if your balance is affected
- Ensure there is proper lighting
- Look at the space you have available and try to remove anything that can contribute to falls or injury such as mats, rugs and furniture
- Exercise with a buddy if you can

Here are a few options for exercising during lockdown:

Online Exercise Programs

Explore YouTube as there are many options available, including:

- Ageless Grace: this is a fun, lively seated program done to music using themes:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=vt0v7ciVMJU
- YMCA has free virtual fitness classes, including seated exercises:
www.ymcahome.ca/yfitness
- Modified Tai Chi classes: www.youtube.com/watch?v=pa_I5NAOW4k&feature=youtu.be

Indoors and Outdoors

Walking is free and easily available; however, it can be challenging for those with HD. Indoor walking tracks may still be open; check with your local organizations for current availability.

You can also contact your physiotherapist to discuss any adaptable equipment you may need for outdoor activities:

- Walking outdoors: be mindful of balance and weather conditions, as they can also have an impact on walking safety. Walking outside using activator poles can help. These poles are designed for people with balance and mobility challenges. Here is a website to learn more: https://urbanpoling.com/post_type_products/activator/
- Biking: an activity that people with HD can pursue with the use of recumbent trikes made for people with disabilities. See your local mobility equipment provider for more information
- Accessible skiing is available in communities that have downhill or cross-country skiing. It involves special equipment called a sit ski. Check out: www.skicanada.org/ready/accessible-skiing-information/

Intellectual Activities

Challenging our brains is important no matter our age or ability. Some activities can be done alone, others with a small group:

- Card and board games: using cardholders, larger cards (available at the dollar store), or magnetized board games help keep the pieces on the board
- Large piece jigsaw puzzles: placing a felt pad underneath helps to keep pieces from getting knocked off
- Computer games: computers can be modified for ease of use. All computers have accessibility options. They are called "Ease of Access" with Microsoft and "Accessibility" for Apple
- Reading: try listening to a book if it is too challenging to hold it or to focus on the written words
- Music: impacts all areas of the brain. Listen to something new, sing along like no one is listening, or try karaoke. This is great for the lungs as well. Did you know that singing a rhythmical song can help people with a movement disorder walk better?

Social Activities

Socializing with others during a pandemic is probably the most challenging and yet is incredibly important to support our overall well-being. Here are some ways to connect with others:

- Have a physically distanced/masked porch visit with friends or neighbours (following regional public health guidelines)
- Connect with a friend via phone or video chat and do an activity together (e.g., a crossword puzzle, look at pictures together, answer trivia, tell jokes or have a story read to you)

- Call in program: many community centres/senior centres are offering call in programs and/or virtual programs that help people feel connected. Check out your local city recreation department or community centres. An example of this can be found at the Third Age Outreach www.thirdageoutreach.ca or at the Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario (OACAO): www.oacao.org/programs/seniors-centre-without-walls/

Spiritual and Emotional Activities

Engaging in spiritual and emotional activities can contribute to improved self-esteem and confidence; they can also help us de-stress. Activities can range from:

- Meditation: Dr. Vasudev (psychiatrist and researcher knowledgeable in HD) studied the impact of meditation and mood and found some promising results. Here is a sample video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CozPpadMho
- Prayer
- Journaling
- Reminiscing
- Crafts, colouring or painting
- Listening to music
- Spending time in nature
- Watching comedy shows or movies
- Laughter yoga has been around for years and has many therapeutic benefits: <https://laughteryoga.org/>

Thank you to Bev Farrell, HSC Group Facilitator and Recreation Therapist for creating this fact sheet. Recreation Therapists are trained professionals that help teach leisure skills, modifications and assistive devices to one's activities, and help connect people to community resources. Go to Therapeutic Recreation Association to find a Recreation Therapist in your area: <https://canadian-tr.org/>

You can also connect with your regional FS team member to get more information about local resources that may be available to you. To find a FS team member near you, please visit the HSC website: <https://www.huntingtonsociety.ca/family-services-team-list/>