

Special Olympics Wellness Program offered to PTOEC

ILLINOIS TEAM WELLNESS is a unique, community-based health and wellness program designed for individuals with and without intellectual disabilities (ID). With both fitness and nutrition components, Illinois Team Wellness is activity-rich, provides incentives to achieve goals, and includes the establishment of clear benchmarks and careful measurement of outcomes.

Illinois Team Wellness, under the theme “Wellness is a Sport,” teaches and trains individuals with and without intellectual disabilities basic and proven knowledge and skills, which improves their overall health and wellness.

Athletes needing to improve their level of physical fitness cannot achieve this solely through sports practices that occur once or twice a week for 1½ hours, particularly when the coach wants to focus heavily on sports skills instruction. Sports practices are helpful, but improving overall health and wellness requires fitness activities on a regular basis – recommended five times a week. Illinois Team Wellness provides this opportunity.

Many Special Olympics participants are very aware that they lack an adequate level of fitness. They may even have knowledge of how to improve their fitness level. However, knowledge alone does not result in change. In order to change behaviors, the new behaviors need to be taught by trained leaders and practiced. The Illinois Team Wellness program is based on providing athletes with the tools they need to change their behavior.

How does Illinois Team Wellness work?

Offered in the same way sport-specific training is offered, an athlete and partners signs up to participate and attends a 1½ hour training session taught by a Special Olympics trained “Wellness Coach” once each week for eight weeks.

The Wellness Coach leads each session, which includes:

- Pre and Post Test (first and last session)
- Fitness Activities: warm-up, cardio, strengthening, flexibility (no equipment needed, easy to do at home)
- Weekly Nutritional Focus (based on choosemyplate.gov lessons)
- Weekly Health Tip (based on Healthy Athletes disciplines)
- Weekly Goal Setting (worksheet for fitness and worksheet for nutrition goals for the week)
- Weekly incentives for short term goals

Fitness. All exercises have been chosen to:

- Provide full body workout for maximum benefit
- Require no specialized gym equipment

- Ensure safety – once proper form is learned, supervision is not required to maintain safety, and Exercises have been reviewed for safety and effectiveness by Dr. James Chesnutt, Head of Sports Medicine at Oregon Health Sciences University.
- Enhance fitness level to aid in sport performance and endurance
- Result in lifestyle changes. Each participant is encouraged to participate in these exercises on his or her own, at home, several times per week.

Nutrition. Sessions have a specific focus each week to help participants make one small change at a time. For example, the focus for one week is on whole grains. Participants learn why whole grains are important and how to incorporate them into a healthy eating plan. Sample recipes are included.

The weekly theme, and materials used for suggestions are primarily found on the USDA's website, www.choosemyplate.gov, which is comprehensive and was prepared by nutritionists.

Healthy Tip. One Healthy Athlete® discipline is addressed each week instructing participants in the various disciplines, e.g. the proper way to brush teeth, why it is important to drink water, et al.

Weekly Action Plan. At the end of each session, participants fill out their Action Plan pages. Based on the lesson plan theme for the week, participants choose the fitness activities and nutritional goals they will do for the week and how many days they will participate.

Incentives. At the end of each session, the Wellness Coach will highlight specific accomplishments of various participants. For example, perhaps a participant succeeded in the previous week's goal to refrain from having a cookie each night. Each individual will have his/her name go into a drawing for some type of fun (and simple) prize. Prizes may be: canvas shopping bag, measuring spoons or cups, etc. Wellness Awards can be presented on the last day of the eight-week session.

Additional Information:

Fitness

These days it is probably more common to find a remote, keyboard or video game controller in the hands of a child at play than a ball, glove or earthworm. In addition, because physical activity is so important during the formative years of children's lives, it is crucial to ensure they are getting the exercise they need. Children with disabilities face even more unique challenges, but in many instances, they can still participate in physical activities.

The amount of exercise a child requires is largely dependent upon age, and balance must be struck, because just as too little exercise can be unhealthy for a child, so can too much. Chances are you will have better luck getting your child moving if there is an element of fun to the activity. Although the recommendation for 60 minutes of activity a day can seem overwhelming, remember that it does not have to be done all at once.

Everyone can benefit from an exercise regimen but those with special needs and physical, intellectual and emotional disabilities even more so. Research has shown that regular exercise benefits people with disabilities and those suffering from chronic conditions and illnesses. Exercise reduces stiffness, improves mobility, posture, balance and gait. Aerobic exercise increases oxygen delivery and neurotransmitters to keep our heart, lungs, and nervous system healthy. General exercise may also reduce depression.

How can I help my child be more active?

Try to make physical activity fun for your child. Children need about 60 minutes of physical activity a day, although the activity doesn't have to be all at once. Several short 10- or even 5-minute spurts of activity throughout the day are just as good. If your child is not used to being active, encourage him or her to start out slowly and build up to 60 minutes a day.

To encourage daily physical activity:

- Let your child choose a favorite activity to do regularly, such as climbing a jungle gym at the playground or joining a sports team or dance class.
- Help your child find simple, fun activities to do at home or on his or her own, such as playing tag, jumping rope, playing catch, shooting baskets, or riding a bike (wear a helmet).
- Limit time with the computer, television, cell phone, and other devices to 2 hours a day.
- Let your child and other family members plan active outings, such as a walk or hike to a favorite spot.

The Benefits include:

- Builds self-esteem.
- Improves social interaction.
- Improves focus and function of daily living skills.
- Weight loss.
- Reduction of anxiety.
- Have fun while getting fit.
- Allows for release of positive and or negative energy resulting in productive output.

Part II Healthy Habits

How can I help my child develop healthy habits?

You can play an important role in helping your child build healthy eating, drinking, physical activity, and sleep habits. For instance, teach your child about balancing the amount of food and beverages he or she eats and drinks with his or her amount of daily physical activity. Take your child grocery shopping and let him or her choose healthy foods and drinks, and help plan and prepare healthy meals and snacks.

Here are some other ways to help your child develop healthy habits:

- Be a good role model. Consume healthy foods and drinks, and choose active pastimes. Children are good learners, and they often copy what they see.
- Talk with your child about what it means to be healthy and how to make healthy decisions.
- Discuss how physical activities and certain foods and drinks may help their bodies get strong and stay healthy. Children should get at least an hour of physical activity daily and should limit their screen time (computers, television, and mobile devices) outside of schoolwork to no more than 2 hours each day.
- Chat about how to make healthy choices about food, drinks, and activities at school, at friends' houses, and at other places outside your home.
- Involve the whole family in building healthy eating, drinking, and physical activity habits. Everyone benefits, and your child who is overweight will not feel singled out.
- Make sure your child gets enough sleep. While research about the relationship between sleep and weight is ongoing, some studies link excess weight to not enough sleep in children and adults.

What can I do to improve my child's eating habits?

Besides consuming fewer foods, drinks, and snacks that are high in calories, fat, sugar, and salt, you may get your child to eat healthier by offering these options more often:

- fruits, vegetables, and whole grains such as brown rice
- lean meats, poultry, seafood, beans and peas, soy products, and eggs, instead of meat high in fat
- fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products or milk substitutes, such as soy beverages with added calcium and vitamin D, instead of whole milk or cream
- fruit and vegetable smoothies made with fat-free or low-fat yogurt, instead of milk shakes or ice cream
- water, fat-free, or low-fat milk, instead of soda and other drinks with added sugars
- try replacing milk shakes or ice cream with fruit and vegetable smoothies.

You also may help your child eat better by trying to

- Avoid serving large portions, or the amount of food or drinks your child chooses for a meal or snack. Start with smaller amounts of food and let your child ask for more if he or she is still hungry.

- If your child chooses food or drinks from a package, container, or can, read the Nutrition Facts Label to see what amount is equal to one serving. Match your child's portion to the serving size listed on the label to avoid extra calories, fat, and sugar.
- Put healthy foods and drinks where they are easy to see and keep high-calorie foods and drinks out of sight—or don't buy them at all.
- Eat fast food less often. If you do visit a fast-food restaurant, encourage your child to choose healthier options, such as sliced fruit instead of fries. Also, introduce your child to different foods, such as hummus with veggies.
- Try to sit down to family meals as often as possible, and have fewer meals “on the run.”
- Discourage eating in front of the television, computer, or other electronic device.
- Overweight boy with bowl of fruit. Make healthy food options available and within easy reach of your child.

To help your child develop a healthy attitude toward food and eating:

- Don't make your child clean his or her plate.
- Offer rewards other than food or drinks when encouraging your child to practice healthy habits. Promising dessert for eating vegetables sends a message that vegetables are less valuable than dessert.

Healthy snack ideas

To help your child eat less candy, cookies, and other unhealthy snacks, try these healthier snack options instead:

- air-popped popcorn without butter
- fresh, frozen, or fruit canned in natural juices, plain or with fat-free or low-fat yogurt
- fresh vegetables, such as baby carrots, cucumbers, zucchini, or cherry tomatoes
- low-sugar, whole-grain cereal with fat-free or low-fat milk, or a milk substitute with added calcium and vitamin D

How else can I help my child?

- You can help your child by being positive and supportive throughout any process or the program to help him or her achieve a healthy weight. Help your child set specific goals and track progress. Reward successes with praise and hugs.
- Tell your child that he or she is loved, special, and important. Children's feelings about themselves are often based on how they think their parents and other caregivers feel about them.

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- Listen to your child's concerns about his or her weight. He or she needs support, understanding, and encouragement from caring adults.

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