

Exercising Safely and Effectively With a Spinal Cord Injury

✗ Don't Use Typical Intensity Indicators



SCI May Prevent or Limit Sweating

Many people with SCI are unable to produce sweat below the level of injury. Some can't produce sweat at all. This can be dangerous when exercising since the body is unable to cool itself. Remember, a lack of sweat doesn't mean your exercise isn't vigorous enough.

Use Water to Mimic Sweat

To avoid overheating while exercising, it is important to hydrate and to keep a spray bottle of cool water on hand. Spray water on your body to mimic sweat.

Heart Rate Can be Misleading

People with an SCI above T5 often experience a blunted heart rate response while exercising. In most people with paralysis, age-related target heart rate "zones" are not recommended.



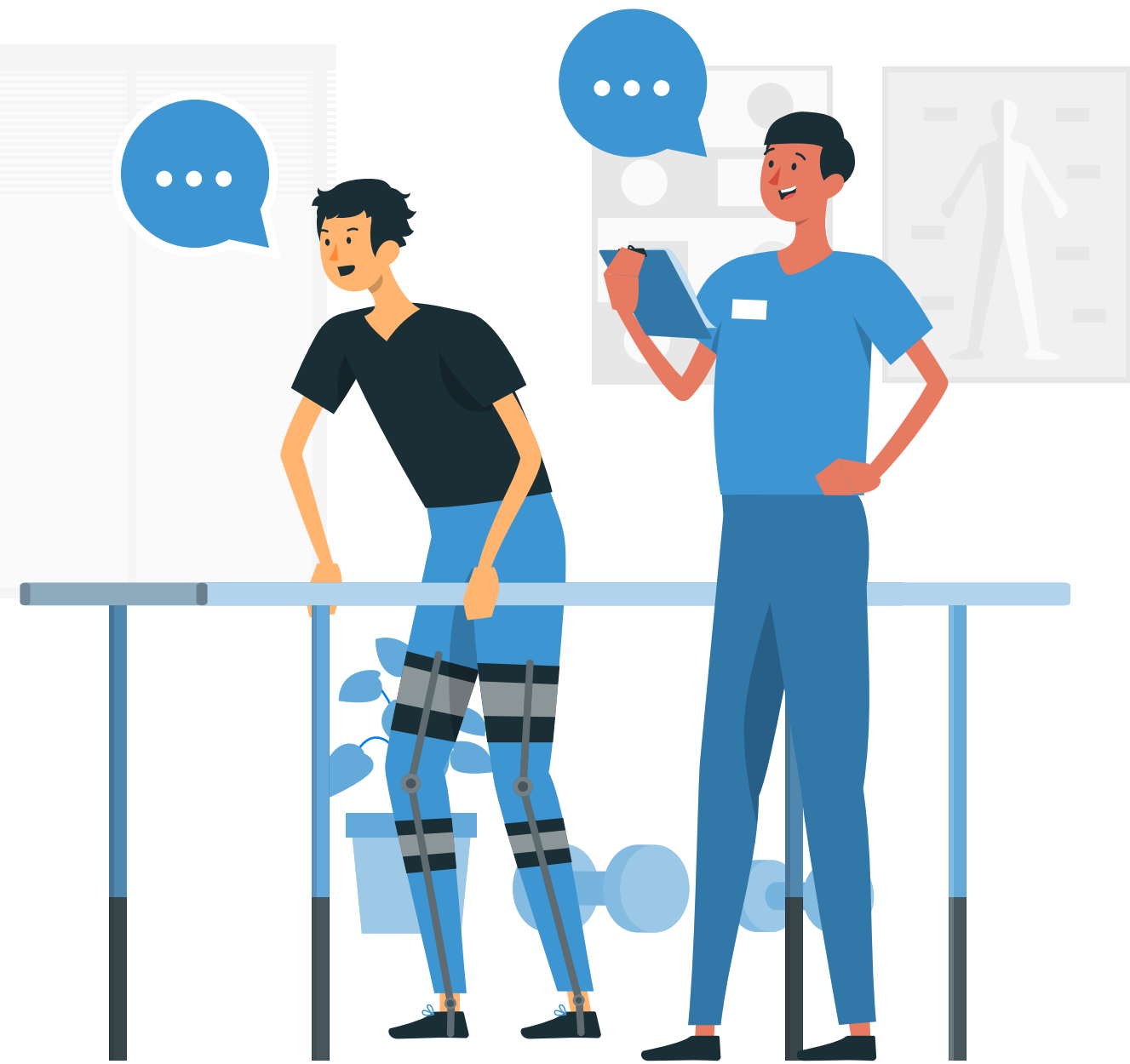
Low Blood Pressure Risks

Many people with SCI have low blood pressure which can cause lightheadedness while exercising. Try to avoid low BP during exercise by wearing compression socks, taking blood pressure medication, and warming up before progressing into a more vigorous workout.

✓ Better Ways to Check Workout Intensity

Talk Tests (TT)

The Talk Test is performed by checking how comfortably you can speak while working out. If sustained speech becomes difficult, it's a reliable indicator of a vigorous workout.



Talk Test Goal: Exercise hard enough to be breathing heavily, but not so hard that you're gasping for air.

Rating Perceived Exertion (RPE)

Perceived exertion is how hard you feel like your body is working. Pay attention to your heart rate (relative to your maximum heart rate), breathing, sweat, and muscle fatigue. RPE is measured from 6-20 on the Borg scale, where 6 is "no exertion at all" and 20 is "maximal exertion".

Perceived Exertion Goal: Target the "somewhat hard" category, level 13-15 on the Borg scale.

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 6 No Exertion | 13-15 Somewhat Hard |
| 7-8 Easy | 16-17 Hard |
| 9-10 Very Light | 18-19 Very Hard |
| 11-12 Fairly Light | 20 Max Exertion |

20 Minutes of Cardio 2x Week

When planning your exercise schedule, it is recommended to exercise at least 20 minutes, at least twice a week. Exercise is essential for good heart health.

Find More Resources at

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(877) 336-7192



Support@SpinalCord.com