

Health and Wellness: Persons with Disabilities and the Risk of Secondary Conditions

2009

December 03 is the United Nations' annual **International Day of Persons with Disabilities**, which aims to widen awareness of disability issues. Globally, persons with disabilities face stigma and discrimination as well as denial of basic human rights including food, housing, health care, education and employment.

Independent Living Canada is marking the day by focussing on Health and Wellness. Health and wellness are not the same as the presence or absence of a disability; they are broader concepts that have a direct impact on everyone's quality of life. Persons with disabilities can be both healthy and well.

Did you know?

- A secondary condition is a disability or health concern that arises as a direct or indirect result of a primary disability or health concern
- Secondary conditions can be physical (reduced mobility) medical (diabetes) or emotional/psychological (depression, anxiety) in nature
- Other secondary effects can be social or environmental, such as increased isolation or reduced accessibility of services or structures
- **Persons with disabilities face higher risk of developing secondary conditions,**¹ and specifically to experience diet-related health complications like malnutrition, constipation and diabetes.²
- One big risk for secondary conditions is obesity – a much higher percentage of adults with disabilities (27.4%) are seriously overweight than people without disabilities (16.5%);³ Children and teens with disabilities also have a higher risk of obesity than their nondisabled peers⁴
- Disability-related mobility limitations and pain or fatigue can make shopping and cooking difficult; inaccessibility of healthy food or adaptive physical activities/facilities, limited incomes and lack of information about proper nutrition for persons with disabilities also contribute to higher rates of obesity
- Obesity can be a factor in other secondary conditions, including depression, fatigue, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, pain, and sleep disturbances
- Secondary conditions can worsen barriers that persons with disabilities already experience, including unnecessary activity limitations, health costs, lost wages, reduced community participation and a decrease in quality of life⁵

Some Solutions

- Your own actions can help completely prevent secondary conditions or greatly reduce their intensity and impact!
- Making healthy food choices, getting regular exercise and reducing tobacco and alcohol intake can help lessen the effects or help entirely avoid secondary conditions like type 2 diabetes, depression, fatigue and pain, heart disease, obesity and sleep disturbances. Check out www.eatrightontario.ca to learn more about these conditions and how to prevent them
- Contact the Active Living Alliance to find out about accessible and inclusive activities and sports facilities near you: www.ala.ca / 800-771-0663 / TTY: 888-771-0663
- Even small efforts make a difference – try adding five minutes of physical activity to your day, drinking water instead of juice, or replacing your coffee cream with milk
- You don't have to be a doctor to take control of your health, but you should check with a doctor if you already have medical limitations or needs around diet or exercise
- Independent Living Centres (ILCs) have accessible information and dedicated staff members to help you learn to make healthful choices for yourself
- For information about healthy eating and good nutrition, healthy lifestyles and physical activity, and substance use and substance misuse, you can call or visit your nearest ILC or check out the National Programs section on IL Canada's website: <http://www.ilcanada.ca/article/national-projects-151.asp>

To locate an ILC near you, go to www.ILCanada.ca or call 613.563.2581 or email info@ilc-vac.ca

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2. "Nutrition and People with a Disability." Dietitians Association of Australia. <http://www.daa.asn.au/index.asp?pageID=2145834485> Retrieved 04 October 2009.
3. "State-Specific Prevalence of Obesity Among Adults with Disabilities." *MMRW*, vol. 51(36). Atlanta: 2002: pp. 805-808.
4. Rimmer, James H., et. al. "Obesity and Secondary Conditions in Adolescents with Disabilities: Addressing the Needs of an Underserved Population." *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2007: vol 41, pp. 225.
5. "Secondary Conditions: Children and Adults with Disabilities." Centre for Disease Control. http://www.cdc.gov/hcbddd/factsheets_DH_sec_cond.pdf Retrieved 03 October 2009.