

Physical Activity Challenges

for Children and Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



Physical activity challenges

Many children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) have difficulty being physically active. This increases their risk for developing obesity. Learning about the challenges they face is an important step towards helping them develop healthy behaviors.

Children may have functional limitations that impact their endurance, balance and motor planning, including:

- Tiring more easily
- Mobility issues
- Motor skill difficulties
- Low muscle tone
- Difficulty self-monitoring

Children may have challenges that affect their ability to follow directions and play with peers

- Learning differences
- Behavioral challenges
- Need for close supervision or support
- Difficulty with social skills

The built environment, program content and the attitudes of adults also impacts children's ability to be physically active

- Playgrounds, swimming pools, trails, and other local resources are not always accessible.
- A range of equipment to meet the needs of all children is not always available.
- Recess, physical education classes, and out-of-school programs are not always adapted to include children of different ability levels or special needs.
- Activities that emphasize competition and winning leave some children out of group activities and team sports.
- Families and caregivers may keep their children from participating in activities due to concerns about safety, being bullied or left out of group games.

TIP

Let's Go! has resources to help you promote healthy eating habits for all children at [LetsGo.org/tools](https://lets-go.org/tools).