

Couples Physical Activity (PA)



by Kelly Bonner

>> **And remember:**
**The couples that
work out together,
stay together.**

No, I'm not referring to couples' PDA, as in public displays of affection, but PA, as in physical activity. I am a sucker for chick flicks, and one of my favorites is *Anna and the King*. I often find myself singing along to an old tune they sang in the movie called "A Bicycle Built for Two." It evokes pictures in my mind of a young girl and her beau riding down the street together. Perhaps you, too, have dreamt of taking a bike ride with your significant other. But if one half of your duo has a disability, then there might not be a bike built for the two of you, and finding any activities that you two can do together probably poses numerous challenges. So I thought I would put together a list of some activities that couples can do together, regardless of ability.

Cardio

First on my list are heart-healthy cardiovascular activities. Finding a type of cardiovascular activity that you two can do together is actually one of the simpler activities to adapt. For instance, you could go on a bike ride (just not always on a bike built for two). There are all kinds of accessible bikes, from handcycles to recumbent leg bikes. Other options could be to go swimming or engage in some other type of pool activity like water aerobics. Another option is to take a walk. More and more parks are making accessible greenway paths. If the weather keeps you indoors, a number of fitness centers have started offering pieces of accessible cardio equipment such as arm bikes or Nusteps, which can provide a great place to start.

Weightlifting and Champion's Rx

The next activity on my list tends to pose a bit more of a challenge. Lifting weights may be one of the hardest activities to do together. Not only do you probably not share the same goals, you also don't have the same amount of function. Here are some things that I have found helpful. Start by turning your workouts into a circuit and have everything ready to go before the workout begins. That way, you can hopefully limit the amount of times you have to transfer, and it's also not quite as time-consuming. When it's time to do an exercise that one person isn't able to do, try switching that exercise for them to target a small muscle group that they can use that the other able-bodied person might not concentrate on. Some examples might include internal/ external shoulder rotation, forearm extension and shrugs.

Another option is the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD's) new Champion's Rx, (nchpad.org/CRx), a high-intensity workout program designed for all ability levels. You can log in daily for a new workout and you and your significant other or spouse can do that workout together. Regardless of what workout program you choose, there are still lots of strength training exercises you can do together, such as all upper-body exercises and some core exercises.



Stretching

Another great partner activity is stretching. You certainly don't have to go to a gym to do this couples activity; it can be done anytime, anywhere. Stretching actually has a ton of benefits, from increased range of motion to helping with balance issues to increasing circulation in limbs below level of paralysis. You can take turns stretching each other and both of you will reap the benefits.

PARTNER STRETCHES

Hamstring, Quadriceps, Calves, Shoulders, Back, Triceps, Chest

Leisure-Time Activity

Last on my list is leisure-time activity. This is usually one of the number one things couples want to do together. Especially now that spring has arrived, folks want to get outside and enjoy life together. My suggestion is to try something new like wheelchair basketball or rugby. My family likes to get together and play wheelchair football. It's something we all can do, from the youngest to the oldest, and we all enjoy it. Another option is Frisbee golf, only play it in an empty parking lot and not on a hilly course. You could also take a stroll through a park or a zoo; many times these places have accessible routes.

And remember: The couples that work out together, stay together. 🔄



SAMPLE 20-MINUTE WORKOUT

*40 seconds of work, 20 seconds to change
Go through the circuit twice*

Able-Body Circuit	Adapted Circuit
Push-Ups	Push-Ups
Squats	Nordic Ski Arms
Rowing	Rowing
Lunges	Shrugs
Triceps Dips	Triceps Dips
Rope Pull	Rope Pull
Planks	Planks
Hang Cleans	Hang Cleans
Box Jumps	Push Motion
Roll Outs	Roll Outs

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