No photos version.

Adaptive skiing – fun, health and much more!

We all know that by taking part in any physical activity we are affecting our lifestyle. In this article I would like to concentrate on participating in snow sports - skiing - by disabled people and it's positive impact that it is having on their health. Within adaptive skiing we have alpine skiing and cross country skiing.

How it all started? Like quite a few things it started in America where after the war in Vietnam, many young and fit veterans who could not get back into the services because of their permanent injuries (amputations, visually impairment, spinal cord injuries) was causing depression. The army introduced news ways of coping with the soldiers mental states and skiing was introduced. As the main aspect at the time was psychological, they wanted to find something they enjoyed doing and can be as independent as possible. For years adaptive skiing has been evolving and at the present time it has grown so much that absolutely everybody with any disability can go skiing and can be a part of the skiing crowd. As the sport became more popular this allowed the growth of special adaptive equipment also.

Within adaptive skiing I feel there are two categories, stand up and sit down skiers. Stand up skiers ski in a regular stand up ski position with or without help of extra adaptive equipment ie outriggers when skiing on one leg, space bar, tip connection, speakers, sticks or tethers.

(photo of crutches, ski bra, skier 3-tracker, 4-tracker)

Sit down skiers, ski in a sit down position using specially made sit skis. Nowadays we have many models that are suited to the skiers disability, age, how advance they are and their goals.

Cross-country sit ski

Cross country sledge - used fully independently by people with strong upper body. Skier controls the sledge by using special ski pools.

Mono-ski

Mono-ski / Uniski – used fully independently by people with strong upper body. Skier controls the sit ski (speed and direction) by hand held outriggers (crutches with small skis at the bottom). Equipped with shock absorber making skiing comfortable even when reaching high speed.

Dualski

Bi-ski / Dualski - used fully independently by people with strong upper body. Skier controls the sit ski (speed and direction) by hand held outriggers (crutches with small skis at the bottom).

Kartski

Kartski – very stable and very easy to learn; used independently by people who can use their arms but who have not got enough balance to ski with Uniski or Dualski. Skier controls the Kartski (speed and direction) with two handles. Helper skis behind attached by a tether as an extra safety assist.

Piloted dualski

Piloted Dualski / Bi-ski – used by dependant skiers, always ski with helper/instructor who is fully in control. Person 'driving' the sit ski must be a competent skier (additional training required) who controls the speed and direction. Skier in the sit ski depending on disability can help by leaning into the turn with head, shoulders and arms (involving skier as much as possible and using deep muscles and balance sensation). Can be used by people in any age and is suitable for any disability, even for people without autonomic movements.

Tandemski

Tandemski – used by dependant skiers, always ski with helper/instructor who is fully in control. Person 'driving' the sit ski must be a competent skier (additional specific training required) who controls the speed and direction. Skier in the sit ski experiences the sliding movement on snow, speed and beautiful mountain scenery. Can be used by people in any age, no weight restriction and is suitable for any disability, even for people without autonomic movements.

Is it healthy for disabled people to ski? I would even say it is more desirable than for non disabled people. It is great way of getting into shape and assisting the process of physiotherapy.

It makes you stronger, more agile which in a daily life equals more independence (transferring from a wheelchair to a car and back again, bed etc).
Improves your balance – when skiing we are moving on a slippery surface continuously getting our body out of balance and recovering it again. Even skiing on a gentle slope with very little speed encourages proprioceptive feeling and your deep muscle to work. Especially useful in a daily life for visually impaired or amputees.

Makes you fitter - as alpine skiing takes place in the mountains at high altitude where the body deals with decreased levels of oxygen, more blood cells are produced and the effect of it can be seen long term after returning from holidays.

Improves your mental state of mind. When skiing, the body produces endorphins putting you in a good mood helping out with depressions - as a disabled person your life has changed forever and no matter how hard you try it won't be the same. When on the mountain all skiers are the same - we all use lift to get to the top and when at the top - point your tips down and the gravity takes us to the bottom and start again. It is one of the very few activities that creates

extremely positive emotions, a great adrenalin rush and all of this you can enjoy with your family, children, parents, friends. Skiing makes you go out, meet new people, make new friends, dramatically improving your self-confidence and interpersonal skills. It is not only disabled people who benefit from skiing but their family and carers. Whether they are skiing together or the disabled person is under instructor supervision the family members/carers have chance to relax, enjoy the moment and absorb all the positive energy, excitement which for a long time will stay in their memories and will transfer into their daily life.

Improves natural function of the body. By constant sliding on uneven surface skiing improves peristaltic movements improving digestion. Being in the cold and concentrating on having fun reduces fantom pains, burns more calories which helps in controlling body weight. This can, in turn, be a long term change even when off the slopes.

Once you have started skiing – you enjoy this and want to progress, therefore you want to get fit, become stronger and look after yourself. Doing any kind of physical exercises on a regular basis will help you in achieving your goal during winter time.

At this time I feel it is worth mentioning about injuries that might occur. As in regular skiing as well in adaptive skiing, skiers might get injuries. It is possible to keep it to minimum by using appropriately chosen and correctly fitted adaptive equipment (outriggers that are too long or too short, wrong type and model of sit ski, not suitable seat, lack of special training or inexperience by ski instructor).

In conclusion I would recommend skiing to anyone with any type of disability. Just from my experience with my clients it really changes the lives of the individuals and their families. Becoming more healthy is an added bonus!

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