



How Do I Get Started?

“Never let not knowing stop you from doing something you enjoy.”

We encourage you to use leisure as a tool to maximize your recovery. Listed below are some starting places to help keep you connected to your community:

- Local city parks and recreation departments
- Local swimming pools/workout facilities (YMCA)
- Local community college/university
- Local Chamber of Commerce
- Local churches/synagogues/local swimming pools/workout facilities

- Spinal cord injury support groups (state, national, local)
- Local library/museums
- Newspapers, Magazines
- Service organizations (Equine programs, Canine Companions)

Community Planning

Family members and caregivers can work with someone who has a spinal cord injury to become as independent and safe as possible. When returning to the community, be sure to have supervision of a responsible adult that can assist with issues that may arise. Here are some helpful tips when planning an outing for friends and family into the community.

Whether you are in a wheelchair or not, there are important considerations related to the community and spinal cord injury that you should ask:

1. Build leisure activity into your weekly calendar.

Keeping structure in your day is important when planning leisure or any other activity. When making your weekly schedule, plan leisure time on a regular basis. Be sure to give enough time to do the activity, transportation, and meal and bathroom times. For example, every Monday and Wednesday is bowling night and every Tuesday and Thursday is cooking club.

2. Plan Ahead: Packing List

Pack everything that you may need while you are out. Consider having an “outing bag” ahead of time and remember to keep it replenished when you use the items. Examples of items to go into your outing bag:

Extra outfit	Gloves	Bottled water
Bladder care supplies	Towels/wash cloths	Sunscreen
Hygienic wipes	Trash bag for soiled linens	Adaptive equipment
Portable suction kit	Feeding equipment	Medications

3. Plan Ahead: Accessibility

- ✓ Park near the entrance of buildings or closest to the accessible entrances. (Utilize a handicap-parking card if you qualify for one).



- ✓ Walk or wheel on smooth surfaces. Be careful of thick carpets or uneven surfaces such as cobblestones, asphalt, or grass.
- ✓ Plan rest breaks periodically, even if you do not feel tired.
- ✓ If you transfer to a booth or chair, keep your wheelchair close to you in case there is an emergency.

If you are in a wheelchair: when you are planning to go out, call ahead. Make sure you know the size of your chair so that you can get the accessible space you need. For example, ask about:

Door Width

Door Type

Stairs (inside and out)

Ramps

Parking

Curb Cuts

Bathrooms

Seating

Table Height

Elevators

Spacing/Aisle

4. Call ahead for reservations

If going to a restaurant, try calling ahead for a reservation so there will not be long waits. Ask for a table that is most accessible to your needs. If swallowing is still a problem, you may want to talk to the restaurant about special diet or meal preparation issues.

5. Shopping

When shopping, it may be best to plan to go during a less busy time the first few times you go out. Have a list of what you need to buy already made before you leave the house so shopping will be more organized and speedy.

6. Transportation

Have travel plans made before leaving home. If you take the bus, know the schedule and if the bus is accessible to any physical needs you may have.

Call taxi drivers ahead of time to arrange pick up and drop off times. **DO NOT DRIVE UNTIL YOU HAVE PASSED A DRIVING TEST FROM YOUR REHAB HOSPITAL.**

7. Medical/safety

Carry important phone numbers and a phone (if possible) with you at all times. Bring extra supplies or medicines with you.

8. Ticketed events

If in a wheelchair:

Let the sales agent know that you want to buy wheelchair seating tickets and if you are going to have someone with you. Often wheelchair seating sections do not provide seats for able-bodied companions unless asked for ahead of time. They may also limit the number of people who can sit with you. If you are going to transfer into a seat (and this would apply to anywhere), make sure you put your wheelchair in a safe place so it will not get stolen. Place it close by in case you have an emergency. Let sales agent know of any of accommodations you may need (examples: hearing and visual needs).

Just a reminder—even though events may be listed as “sold out,” there still may be wheelchair seating available. Always ask.



Tips and Techniques for Enhancing Mobility and Maximizing Endurance in the Community

- Park near the entrance of buildings or closest to the accessible entrances. (Utilize a handicap-parking card if you qualify for one.)
- Utilize curb cuts whenever possible.
- Use ramps when available instead of stairs.
- Look for automatic doorways or ask for assistance when opening heavy doors.
- Walk or wheel on smooth surfaces. Be careful of thick carpets or uneven surfaces such as cobblestones, asphalt, or grass.
- Use a backpack instead of carrying a purse.
- Plan rest breaks periodically, even if you do not feel tired. Scout out benches, chairs, etc. to sit on. If waiting in line, ask for a chair.
- Request to sit closer to the entrance or closer to a restroom, or in a quieter area depending upon your needs. Travel during off peak times, when stores and restaurants are not as busy.
- Have prescriptions called into pharmacies or mail order prescriptions to avoid having to wait to have a prescription filled.
- Try to schedule appointments, such as dental, medical, hairdressing, etc. early in the morning or during off peak hours. Try calling prior to leaving for an appointment to determine if appointments are running on time.
- Planning ahead is the key to conserving energy in the community.