



Frequently Asked Questions

Fitness is an often overlooked yet integral way to improve performance. The questions below are commonly asked by coaches who want to incorporate fitness within their athlete's sport training.



What is Fitness?

Fitness is being your healthiest and performing at your best by making daily choices to eat healthy foods, drink water and be physically active. Healthy foods include fruits, vegetables, grains and proteins. Water is the best beverage choice for staying hydrated. Physical activity can be any activity (sports, exercises, chores, etc.) that is moderate to vigorous intensity, feels challenging, and increases breathing and heart rate. The World Health Organization recommends 150 minutes per week for adults and 60 minutes per day for youth. As a coach, you can help your athletes to improve their fitness by following the simple recommendations in this guide.

How can Fitness help prepare my athletes for their sport?

Adequate levels of fitness keep our athletes healthy—**decreasing the risk of illnesses, injuries, and diseases** that might prevent their participation for a season or in the future. Additionally, **specific areas of fitness can enhance performance.**

- Proper warm-up routines prepare your athletes to play at his or her best
- Strength exercises decrease the risk of injuries and allow athletes to jump, kick, throw and move higher, farther, and faster.
- Endurance exercise increase stamina and energy to get through longer and more challenging practices and competitions.
- Flexibility exercises decrease the risk of injuries and help improve form on sports skills.
- Sport specific exercises improve agility, balance, speed and power.
- Healthy nutrition and hydration improves focus, energy levels and recovery.

What are examples of how I can add fitness to my sports season?

Every coach can find a way to integrate fitness into their practice. Below are some easy, yet impactful strategies for encouraging and adding fitness:

- **Be a good role model** – hold yourself to the same standards you recommend to your athletes, and model healthy behaviors (activity, food, beverage and snack choices)
- **Start each practice with a dynamic warm-up** – this type of warm-up has replaced static (hold for 10 seconds) stretches for reducing injury and enhancing performance
- **Keep athletes active during practice** – shrink the playing field, form multiple drill lines, allow athletes to interact with and touch the ball more often, incorporate [Fitness Card](#) exercises into circuits



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- **Offer water breaks throughout practice** and encourage athletes to drink water rather than sports drinks. This simple act reminds athletes about the importance of water and hydration on performance and recovery
- **Measure progress on a few key fitness assessments** – chose 1-2 most beneficial for your specific sport (e.g. pushups, 6 minute walk test, etc.) and measure throughout season to show athletes how they've improved
- **Utilize the [Fit 5 Guide, Fitness Cards and Videos](#)** as resources to educate athletes on fitness, help them establish goals, and guide their exercise routines
- **Ask athletes questions that remind and motivate them to be fit and healthy** – for example, if they had a healthy snack before practice, or if they have been active
- **Encourage athletes to make healthy food and beverage choices and to stay active** even when they aren't at practice
- **Engage family members and other caregivers to support the message of fitness** at home and provide tips on how they can help you promote a healthy lifestyle
- **Recruit others who can help lead fitness activities** – reach out to trained fitness professionals, athlete leaders, or family and caregivers that have expertise to help.

Do I need special training to add fitness to the sports season?

No, many coaches already know basic principles and can make an impact in athletes' fitness levels applying what they already know. However, if you are looking to learn more about fitness or for new ideas on how you can integrate fitness within your practices, Special Olympics has resources to help.

What resources are available to help me integrate fitness?

Special Olympics has a series of resources available to you

- **Fit 5 Guide** — concise guide focused on specific tips to improve nutrition, hydration and physical activity, written at level of easy understanding and includes a tracker.
- **Fitness Cards** — progressive series of exercises in Endurance, Strength and Flexibility
- **Sample practices**—samples show how easy it is to add fitness into any practice
- **Active Practice Guide** -- organizational and instructional strategies that can increase the amount of time spent being active in practice
- **Practice Planner Template** — tool for coaches to organize fitness within practice
- **Fitness Coach description** — Job description for a volunteer who can assist the coach in integrating fitness throughout the season
- **Family Involvement tip sheet** — suggestions on how family members can support a healthy lifestyle at home
- **Warm-Up and Cool-Down resources** — explanations, exercises, and samples to help build a proper warm-up and cool-down
- **Fitness Assessment Guide** — instructions for adding in simple ways to measure progress
- **E-Learning Course** – hour long course to ensure coaches feel prepared to encourage and integrate fitness within the sports season