5 steps to help keep your patients with disabilities healthy

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Adults with disabilities are three times more likely to have chronic diseases such as diabetes or heart disease than adults without disabilities, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Follow five steps to ensure your patients with disabilities stay healthy and lessen their chances to develop chronic diseases.

Though it can be difficult for adult patients with disabilities to get physical activity, they are more likely to do so if their doctors recommend it. Doctors should know the Physical Activity Guidelines and help their patients overcome barriers to reach their physical activity goals, according to the CDC’s new report on adults with disabilities.

Take these five steps to discuss and recommend physical activity options that match each patient’s specific abilities and connect patients to resources to be physically active.

- **Step 1: Know that the Physical Activity Guidelines are for everybody.** Anyone can benefit from being physically active, so encourage at least 2.5 hours a week of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity for all patients, including those with disabilities.

- **Step 2: Ask your patients about physical activity.** Ask how often they are active, what types of activity they enjoy, and how they think they can add more physical activity into their lives.

- **Step 3: Discuss patients’ barriers to physical activity.** Some patients may find it difficult to get to programs, places and spaces where they can be physically active, or may not have the social support. Others may have trouble finding fitness and health professionals who can provide options that meet their abilities.

- **Step 4: Recommend physical activity options.** Describe each patient’s options based on the patient’s abilities. Some options include brisk walking, wheeling oneself in a wheelchair, swimming laps, water aerobics, hand-crank bicycling, wheelchair basketball, tennis, football or softball.

- **Step 5: Refer patients to resources and programs.** Make sure patients understand recommendations, and refer them to resources that can help them begin or maintain their physical activity.

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/population-care/5-steps-help-keep-your-patients-disabilities-healthy

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physical activity. Check in with patients about their activity levels at every visit.

Learn more about physical activity resources and programs to recommend to your patients with disabilities on the CDC website.

The CDC is planning a group call for physicians later this month to discuss more options for patients with disabilities. Watch AMA Wire™ for more information.