

# SCI Step Together

**An 8-week physical activity program  
created for individuals with  
spinal cord injury who walk.**



cdpp

Canadian Disability Participation Project

Le projet canadien sur la participation sociale  
des personnes en situation de handicap

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## About SCI Step Together

### SCI Step Together

SCI Step Together is an 8-week program created for individuals with spinal cord injury (SCI) who walk to become more physically active. The program is also to help people have better or higher quality experiences in physical activity. The program is based on the best research evidence specifically for people with SCI who walk. SCI Step Together was developed by scientific research experts, individuals with lived experience, a SCI community organization, and Curatio (now known as RxPx Inc.).

### Why We Made This

People with SCI who walk participate in much less physical activity than individuals with SCI who use manual wheelchairs. However, there has been very little research looking at physical activity for people with SCI who walk and there are no programs to help improve physical activity for this group. This is the first program to support people with SCI who walk to change their physical activity behaviour.

### The Purpose

SCI Step Together was created to support people with SCI who walk to have more and better physical activity experiences. In this program, you will learn about the conditions that lead to better quality experiences in physical activity, the SCI physical activity guidelines and benefits, how to track your activity and set goals, planning for activity and how to cope with barriers that arise, how to feel more confident about yourself, skills for physical activity you might need, and resources to support your physically active lifestyle moving forward.

### Adapt It

The 8-week program was originally created as a mobile application for your smartphone, and you can still access the Curatio Stronger Together app on your smartphone in the “SCI Step Together” community: <https://apps.apple.com/ca/app/curatio-stronger-together/id1517935369>. The app provides more tools like health coaching, peer support, and health and mood tracking. We decided to put the modules online so others can access the educational content on more kinds of devices. We hope that you take what you need from this program and adapt the information as you see fit.

### Research References

- Developing the program:

Lawrason, S. V. C., Brown-Ganzert, L., Campeau, L., MacInnes, M., Wilkins, C. J., & Martin Ginis, K. A. (2022). mHealth physical activity intervention for individuals with spinal cord injury: Planning and development processes. *JMIR Formative Research*, 6(8), e34303. doi:10.2196/34303.

- Assessing the impact of the program:

Lawrason, S. V. C., & Martin Ginis, K. A. (2023). Evaluating the feasibility, acceptability, and engagement of a mHealth physical activity intervention for individuals with spinal cord injury: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 45(2), 61-76. doi:10.1123/jsep.2022-0087

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## Authors

The SCI Step Together program was created in 2021. The modules were published online in 2023. The authors of the program include:

- Dr. Sarah Lawrason, PhD, University of British Columbia
- Dr. Kathleen Martin Ginis, PhD, University of British Columbia

## Acknowledgements

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- Lysa Campeau, RxPx Inc.
- Megan MacInnes, Community Research Partner
- CJ Wilkins, Community Research Partner



## “SCI Step Together” – Overall 8-Week Framework:

<b>Module 1:</b> Quality Participation, Autonomy, and Competence	<b>Week 1:</b> Quality physical activity participation <b>Week 2:</b> Physical activity guidelines and benefits <b>Week 3:</b> Self-monitoring and goal setting
<b>Module 2:</b> Autonomy and Competence	<b>Week 4: Action planning</b> <b>Week 5: Coping planning</b>
<b>Module 3:</b> Competence	<b>Week 6:</b> Skills <b>Week 7:</b> Beliefs about capabilities <b>Week 8:</b> Program recap and providing tools for independent use

You can find this information and more in the Curatio Stronger Together app on your smartphone in the “SCI Step Together” community: <https://apps.apple.com/ca/app/curatio-stronger-together/id1517935369>

### WEEK 4 – Action planning

#### 1. Week 4 – Welcome & Overview

Welcome to Week 4 of SCI Step Together. Module 1 was all about exploring quality participation in physical activity, physical activity guidelines, benefits of physical activity, and goal-setting and self-monitoring. So far, we’ve given you some strategies, ideas, and tools to help you enhance your health and wellbeing. On your end, you may have set yourself up with some initial goals, connected with new peers, and made positive lifestyle changes that will benefit your health!

It’s time to dive into Module 2! We’ll start off by talking about action planning for physical activity. Remember, you can work on Module 2 at your own pace over the next two weeks.

A quick reminder that this program has been developed by the SCI Action Canada lab at the University of British Columbia in collaboration with Curatio, to help you stay strong throughout your health journey.

Week 4, here we come!



## 2. Week 4 – Educational – Action Planning

Now that you have set some SMART goals, let’s come up with a plan to put them into action. This week, we will focus on **“action planning”**. Your action plan will be a day-by-day plan for physical activity. You can make a plan at the beginning of each new week.

Like the SMART goals, a good **action plan** should include your planned activity type, location, time and duration, and the intensity. The plan should have all the details in place, so that when you go to be active, you already know what you’re going to do.

Here is an example of an action plan for one week of light physical activity. As you can see, you don’t have to be active each day. You can start with small activity chunks. Remember to try to incorporate activities that provide you with a sense of quality physical activity participation (belongingness, autonomy, challenge, mastery, meaning, or engagement).

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
<b>What</b>	OFF	Bodyweight exercises	OFF	OFF	Walk	OFF	Play catch with kids
<b>Where</b>		Home (basement)			Around the block		Front yard
<b>When</b>		6am			5pm		3 pm
<b>How long</b>		20 min.			15-20 min.		15 min.
<b>How hard</b>		Light			Light		Light

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## Putting it All Together

We've learned a lot about goal-setting, self-monitoring, and action planning! Here's how they all work. First, you set a **SMART goal** for physical activity. Second, to achieve that goal, you need an action plan. Your **action plan** tells you what physical activity you'll be doing in the future. Third, to see if you're meeting that goal, you need to **self-monitor** your physical activity. Self-monitoring means tracking the physical activity that you've done each day or week (in the past). meaning, or engagement).



### 3. Week 4 – Additional Supports

Here are some reliable resources you can use to learn more about physical activity for adults with SCI who walk. Don't forget, your Community Coach is here to help you if you need additional support. We also encourage you to reach out to other community members if you have questions or would like to share your experiences!

Additionally, you can always also contact the members of your health team (your family doctor, nurse practitioner, etc.), or call 811 (in BC) to speak to a pharmacist or nurse right away.

- Planning physical activity: <https://cvquality.acc.org/docs/default-source/initiatives/hospital-to-home/signs-and-symptoms/success-metric-9/ama-physical-activity-action-plan.pdf>



#### **4. Week 4- Top Takeaways**

Yay! Week 4 is complete. You're halfway there! We would love to know what your top takeaway was from this week. Did you learn something new about action planning to achieve your physical activity goal?

Until next week, we are sending you healthy wishes and warm regards!



## WEEK 5 – Coping planning

### 1. Week 5 – Coping Planning

Welcome to Week 5! How are you feeling? This week we are going to discuss some skills and provide tools for planning to overcome barriers during physical activity.

A quick reminder that this program has been developed by the SCI Action Canada lab at the University of British Columbia in collaboration with Curatio, to help you stay strong throughout your health journey.

Here we go!





## 2. Week 5 – Educational – Coping planning

We are going to introduce coping planning as a strategy for pushing through potential setbacks.

### Overcoming Barriers

When challenges or barriers arise, it is important to know how to cope with them. This way you can continue to meet your physical activity goals, rather than getting stuck, or giving up altogether.

### Coping Planning

Coping planning is a form of problem solving. More specifically, **coping planning** gets you to first identify barriers and other triggers that can interfere with your physical activity action plans, and to then identify solutions to overcome those barriers. The idea is to think about and come up with solutions to barriers in advance, so that when a barrier comes your way, you will know what to do to stay on track.

Keep in mind that everyone's goals, and action plans and coping strategies can be different, and what works best for someone else might not be best suited to you. Focus on your own path!

Take a moment to think back to some of the barriers that you faced over the past week that may have hindered your physical activity. Some of the primary barriers to exercise that people with SCI who walk have told us are lack of time to exercise, pain or other symptoms, no group or community to be active with, or even lacking confidence in yourself.

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Now let's try a stepwise problem-solving approach.

**Step 1: Identify the problem.**

Think of a barrier that you faced over the last week in meeting your physical activity goal. Focus on just one barrier for now and be specific.

**Step 2: Identify a few achievable solutions to this problem.**

Think of a few reasonable solutions. Decide on one solution to try first. Now imagine yourself dealing with the barrier with this solution.

**Step 3: Self-evaluate.**

Determine how well this solution worked. If the outcome was "pretty good", then keep this strategy. If the outcome was "weak", then try a different solution from the list.

**Step 4: Determine additional factors to overcoming the barrier.**

Do you need more assistance overcoming this barrier?

- What kind of assistance do you need? Additional resources? Social support?
- Who might be available to provide you with social support? (Family, friends, the Stronger Together group)
- What are some barriers you face when asking for help from others? Try reaching out to someone who you trust.
- Recognize that different people can provide different types of support. Think about how your family, and friends, might be able to provide different forms of support to you in your physical activity journey.

*Here is an example to guide you through your own problem solving:*

**Step 1: Identify the problem.**

"I do not have the time to be physically active on the weekdays when I work all day"

**Step 2: Identify a few achievable solutions to this problem.**

"Instead of sitting while I watch TV at night, I can do some resistance-band exercises while my favorite show is on"

**Step 3: Self-evaluate.**

"I know that I spend at least one hour watching TV a night. I know I can spend this time doing light-intensity physical activities"

**Step 4: Determine additional factors to overcoming the barrier.**

"Sometimes my kids ask me to read them a bedtime story during this time. I will ask my partner to take on this duty so that I can be active while still enjoying "me" time!"

**Need a little more inspiration? Here are a few examples of barriers and strategies to overcome them. These barriers and solutions came from other people who walk with SCI:**

Barrier	Potential Solution
<b>No time? No problem!</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make an action plan, and write it down</li> <li>• Spend more time with family and friends by exercising with them</li> <li>• Use active transportation and count it as part of your exercise for the day (e.g., walk to the store)</li> </ul>
<b>Physical barriers get in my way</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If pain is a barrier, exercise may be effective in reducing pain</li> <li>• Think of other types of physical activity that may be less painful – something is better than nothing!</li> <li>• Regular physical activity can make you feel more energized – try to find that balance of feeling energized but not more fatigued from exercise</li> <li>• Properly adapting your equipment can make exercise easier</li> </ul>
<b>Lacking a support system who understands my goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find an “exercise buddy” – this doesn’t even have to be in person. It could be over video chat, or both of you could join into the same online class</li> <li>• Join a local community exercise centre</li> <li>• Reach out to your Stronger Together community!</li> </ul>
<b>“I can’t”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start with what you know and build your skills. Work what works, and focus on what you can do</li> <li>• Take a tour of a facility that offers an activity that interests you</li> <li>• If equipment is expensive, try community-based programs that have adapted equipment available for you</li> <li>• Speak with those you trust about your fears</li> </ul>

### Problem Solving in Action Planning

You can also problem solve within your action plan.

*Jeff, a 53-year-old lawyer who lives with SCI and walks, tells the story of how he stays active when things get in his way:*

“I try my best to stick to my action plan, but I’m not always perfect, and it doesn’t always work out. Usually, I plan on going swimming at the pool after work at 5pm on Wednesday’s. I really like doing this especially now that the pool is back open after Covid-19. Swimming makes me work hard, and I get a sense of ‘flow’ when I’m in the water.

Last week, I went to the pool, only to find out it’s closed unexpectedly for the rest of the evening. I was bummed. Normally, I’d just go home and not think about missing that session. However, I tried to problem solve and think

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of what I could do instead. I thought about going for a walk at home or doing an at-home yoga class. Both are good solutions, but I realized that I really wanted to swim. So, I re-booked my swim time for tomorrow – and I'm so glad I did. I love fitting in time to be in the water!"

*Marsha, a 29-year-old civil engineer who walks with SCI, tells her story:*

"On Saturday's, I love taking my dog for a long walk while listening to a podcast. Especially when the weather is nice and sunny! I have a 3-year-old Bernedoodle named Tucker, so he has a LOT of energy to burn. Walking my dog provides me with a sense of meaning because I want to make sure he is well taken care of, and I feel closer to him.

Last week, I woke up to take Tucker out and my legs were much more spastic than usual. I was also in some pain. I tried everything to make it better – stretching, foam-rolling, medication, but nothing was really working well. I know that sometimes physical activity can help, but I really wasn't up for taking Tucker for a walk. I knew he still needed to get some exercise, so I thought of what I could do instead of my usual 1-hr power walk. I thought of maybe taking him out slowly around the block or biking while he was on leash. I decided instead to drive to the dog park, let Tucker have some play time, while I sat on the bench. When we got home, I did some bicep curls, triceps extensions, and shoulder press with my dumbbells. It felt so much better than using my legs – and Tucker still got his exercise too!"

Managing barriers and overcoming them can help you to realize that physical activity has more than just physical benefits!



### **3. Week 5 – Coping Planning (Additional Resources)**

Here are some reliable resources you can use to learn more about problem solving in physical activity for individuals with SCI who walk.

Overcoming barriers: <https://sciguidelines.ubc.ca/tools-for-success/overcoming-barriers/>



#### 4. Week 5 – Top Takeaways

Amazing job! You have completed Week 5 and Module 2 of the program! We hope the last few weeks have increased your knowledge about physical activity by giving you space to reflect on your experiences, and providing you with relevant and valuable educational information. Do you feel a bit better prepared to deal with potential barriers through coping planning and problem solving?

