

NFI & PHYSICAL FITNESS

Leading an active lifestyle is important for many reasons. Participation in sports teaches teamwork, provides an outlet for physical activity and encourages children to work hard to achieve a skill. In addition, children who participate in sports tend to perform better in school and have improved peer relationships. However, selecting an appropriate sport for your child is an important first step for success.

These are sports we recommend for your child with NFI:

- » Swimming/diving
- » Gymnastics
- » Dance
- » Tennis
- » Golf
- » Track
- » Cross country
- » Cycling
- » Skating
- » Martial arts
- » Skiing
- » Wrestling

For more information, please contact
St. Louis Children's Hospital Physical Therapist:

COURTNEY DUNN, PT, DPT

cmd3491@bjc.org | 314.454.2218
St. Louis Children's Hospital
One Children's Place, Ste. 2S50
St. Louis, MO 63110

St. Louis Children's Hospital,
Neurofibromatosis (NF) Center
One Children's Place, Suite 2D
St. Louis, MO 63110
314.454.6100 | NFclinic@neuro.wustl.edu



StLouisChildrens.org | NFCenter.wustl.edu



FITNESS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH NFI



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WHAT IS NF1?

Neurofibromatosis Type 1 (NF1) is the most common type of Neurofibromatosis, affecting approximately 1 in 2,500 individuals worldwide. This genetic condition affects almost every organ system, causing a predisposition for tumors to grow on nerves in the brain and throughout the body. In addition, children with NF1 often struggle with delays in learning, social, attention and motor/coordination skills.

ATTENTION DEFICITS

Many children with NF1 have problems maintaining focus, controlling their impulses and sitting still. These problems are often referred to as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Children with ADHD have difficulty engaging appropriately with their peers, which is often magnified when they participate in team sports.

COORDINATION DIFFICULTIES

Another common challenge children with NF1 face is a lack of coordination. This inability to coordinate their body parts to perform a task can result in fine and gross motor skill deficits, which are especially apparent when participating in team sports.

TEAM SPORTS & NF1

Traditional team sports are a great way for children to stay active, especially at a very young age. However, if coordination and/or attention are difficult for your child, team sports can present significant challenges (increasingly so as your child enters late grade school/middle school), because they:

- Often include long periods of down time between playing (waiting to bat, waiting for the ball to return to defense), making sustained attention to the game difficult
- Move at the speed of the game rather than at the speed of each participant, not allowing for extra time or multiple attempts to succeed
- Focus on the “star” athlete, offering little recognition for athletes with less inherent talent



BENEFITS OF INDIVIDUAL SPORTS

Participation in individual sports may enable your child with NF1 to experience greater success, especially if coordination and/or attention are a problem. Individual sports can better accommodate the specific needs of your child, encouraging success at the pace of each athlete.

Additionally, individual sports, such as swimming/diving, dancing, martial arts, golf and gymnastics:

- Provide increased time to focus on a single skill, enabling mastery of the skill prior to advancing
- Promote continual motion during practice, limiting down time and lessening the impact of decreased attention
- Foster healthy competition and team building, with a focus on individual success rather than solely on achievement as a group