

Engaging all women in sport and activity

Many disabled women are missing out on the lifelong benefits of sport and physical activity. We have created a number of engagement resources that encourage you to think about the ways to include disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.

This sheet provides top tips on how to engage more women, including disabled women.





Key statistics



1.5 million fewer women are physically active each week compared to men. (1)



Inactivity is more prevalent among disabled women (44%) than non-disabled women (**22%**). Furthermore, it increases sharply as the number of impairments an individual has increases. (1)



This is important because almost **three quarters of all disabled people (74%)** have two or more impairments. (13)



Women with hearing, visibility or mobility impairments are the **most inactive**. (1)



7 in 10 disabled people report wanting to do more sport (7) and this resource is designed to guide what you Think, Do and Say when supporting disabled women to become more active.

There are more disabled women than men in the UK. **23%** of women are disabled compared to **20%** of men. (9)

Think: Understand your audience

Women's values

Women in Sport's ground-breaking research highlights that every woman's relationship with physical activity is unique and highly complex. Despite this, all women have simultaneously held values that influence decision-making and prioritisation within their lives.

- Women will use some values more than others throughout the different stages of their life.
- For sport and activity to appeal to women, it must align with women's values.



I didn't feel I'd fit in [to a normal gym] if I was hobbling around. Physically I suppose I'm quite vain and I suppose I was worried about being the odd one out.

**Get Out Get Active
female participant**

Barriers

There can be a whole range of barriers that push sport away from women's conscious consideration. These may include disconnecting with sport after leaving school (even for those who loved it), a lack of opportunities, perceptions of sport as unfeminine or too few relatable role models.

Activity Alliance found that the barriers preventing disabled people from being more active can be grouped into physical, logistical and psychological.

Psychological barriers were found to play the biggest role in preventing disabled people taking part in sport (2). A lack of confidence and self-belief prevents many disabled people from even considering trying sport or physical activity.(2)

The fear of being judged for many women is an important emotional barrier, often underlying more commonly expressed practical barriers. For example, a woman may be wary of attending a fitness class for fear of being judged for not having the 'right' clothing. However, what she might say is that she does not have time to attend a fitness class.

Consultation with women is key to understanding what is important to them, the values they hold and their emotional and practical barriers.

Top tip

To make your offer appeal to disabled women, consult with them to understand which values drive their behaviour and the barriers that have previously stopped them taking part.



Do: Programming and delivery for disabled women

Make it easy for women to act:

I couldn't commit to gym membership with my work and family life. I'm not sure I'd use it and it would be a waste of money.

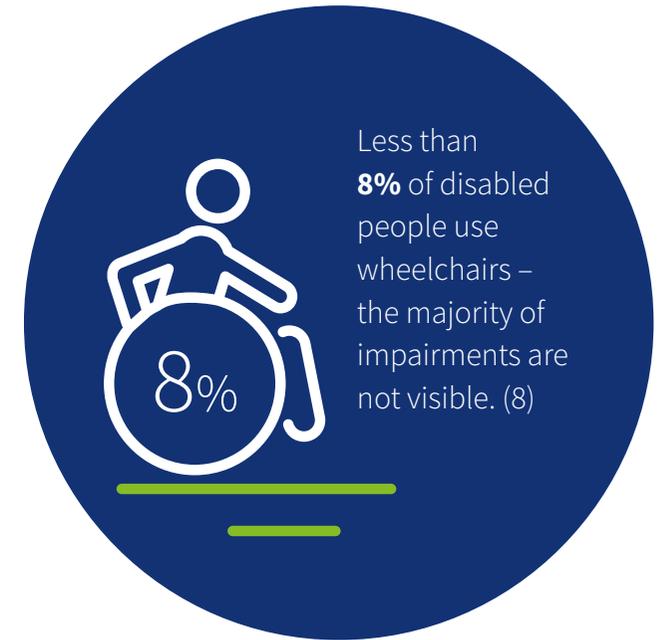
Get Out Get Active female participant

If I'm feeling brave, then I'll walk down to Morrison's.

Get Out Get Active Thanet Inactive female

Right place, right offer

Take the activity into the community physically through outdoor sessions or different venues (4). Remember what you may consider 'local' can be very different to others. Two thirds of disabled people would prefer to take part in sport with both disabled and non-disabled people (7). Specific activities designed for disabled people, are not always appealing for women to participate.



Right time

To reflect the increasing complexity of women's lives, offers need to fit around them rather than demanding women fit in to a rigid structure. Ideally, the offer is easy going where women could drop in and out when it suited them. Up-front fees can also be a barrier to entry. Many women need the flexibility to be able to miss a session here and there, so committing to and paying for a block of sessions can be undesirable.



Right welcome

Ensure the first experience at your session is enjoyable. Consider how you can help to reduce the fear of being in unfamiliar environments, inexperience with equipment or fearing feeling exposed due to lacking ability. (4)

“ We have a buddy system [at a sitting volleyball club for disabled people] and I think that works really well. When a new player comes, one of us will become their buddy and just text them and say ‘Are you coming tonight, do you want to meet first and we will go to it together?’ (5) ”

Keeping women coming back

Regular programme monitoring and consultation with women is key to ensure sessions continue to align to women’s values and ever-changing lives. Women in Sport insight (11) found sports clubs need to consult with participants more, take on board some of their suggestions and be flexible and adaptable enough to make changes to the way the club is run.

Women and girls move in and out of activity both physically and emotionally over time. Be aware of this, notice the shifts and support women to come back despite changes in life stage and circumstances. (4)

Top tip

Disabled women can be supported to participate by making small changes to existing opportunities. For example, allow a friend or relative to accompany a visually impaired woman for free.



Say: Inclusive communication and marketing

Who are you talking to?

For effective marketing and communication consider who your target audience is, their life stage and where they are in their journey to being active. A social media post to attract beginners should be different to a post aimed at keeping women attending sessions.

Marketing and communications, which speak to more than one of women's values, maximises the chance of it being relevant. E.g. a good way to catch up with friends or meet new people.

Consider how you can reach more women by providing accessible and inclusive communications. Activity Alliance's Inclusive Communications Guide is an ideal starting point. Download it free at

www.activityalliance.org.uk/communications

Don't just talk about 'sport'

For many women, sport has baggage. 51% of girls say they are put off sport because of their experience of school sport and PE (12). Selling your activity to a wider audience may require you to soften traditional sporting language to counter some of the negative associations. (4)

Content is key

Provide as much information as possible to address emotional barriers and fear of judgement. This could be who to meet and where, what to bring and wear and what they can expect when they arrive.



Many women do not identify with being disabled and are put off by advertising that focuses on disability.



Top tip

Use images of relatable 'women like me' and text describing the activity can help disabled women to see the suitability of the session.

Source

- 1 Active People Survey 10
- 2 Barriers to Participation in sport, Activity Alliance
- 3 Understanding Women's Lives in 2013 & the role of sport and physical activity (Women in Sport)
- 4 Go Where Women Are, Sport England
- 5 Active Together (Activity Alliance, 2014)
- 6 Active Lives survey 2016/17
- 7 Lifestyle Survey 2013, Activity Alliance
- 8 NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency
- 9 DWP Family Resources Survey 2016-2017
- 10 Engaging disabled people through effective use of insight and research, Activity Alliance
- 11 The Ideal Sports Club for Women, Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2011
- 12 Changing the Game for Girls: NGB Factsheet. Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation 2012
- 13 Office for Disability Issues and Department for Work and Pensions, Life Opportunities Survey

For more information, use [Activity Alliance's Talk to Me Principles](#). These support you to engage more women and make activity more attractive to disabled women. Those who put on activities should use this insight and combine it with local insight. It will help you to understand women's barriers, motivations and calls to action.

Contact Women in Sport by calling 020 3137 6263 or emailing support@womeninsport.org. For more information on Women in Sport's research and to access the research and advice service visit www.womeninsport.org/research-and-advice/our-publications/.

Find all our research on our website, this sheet is part of our engagement resource.

Read all the sheets here activityalliance.org.uk/engagement

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This document is available in Word format. Please contact us if you need support. Activity Alliance is the operating name for the English Federation of Disability Sport. Registered Charity no. 1075180