

All About Adaptive Sports

What are adaptive sports? Adaptive sports are aimed to introduce people with physical disabilities into the world of sports by adapting them to promote social inclusion and personal growth (de Lima & Alves, 2020). Adaptive sports started as a means of rehabilitation but has now transitioned beyond that, to work and leisure.



How Are Sports Adapted?

- They are similar to typical sports
- There are allowed modifications to allow those with disabilities to participate
- Evens the playing field for those with disabilities to compete with each other

Modifications/adaptations include footguards for wheelchair users, larger balls, balls with rattles inside for those with visual impairments, larger targets in archery, and many more.



Who Are Good Candidates for Adaptive Sports?

Wheelchair users:

Basketball, soccer, rugby, tennis, hockey, track and field events, and many more. Wheelchair users have much more access to adapted sports.

Visual Impairments:

Goalball, beep baseball, swimming, weight/powerlifting, and track and field events.

Developmental Disabilities:

Those with developmental disabilities can participate in a wide variety of adapted sports.



Where Can I Find Adaptive Sports?

Adaptive sports can be found all across the country. Many states have adapted sports leagues that offer many different sports to those of all ages.

- NYC Parks offers adaptive sports programs all across the city
- The United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee shows adaptive sports clubs all across the state
- The Adaptive Sports Foundation offers programs all year long

[check out our youtube video here!](#)

Why are Adaptive Sports Important?

- Sports are play, and play is an important aspect of daily life
- Adaptive sports play an important role in the development of skills and abilities
- Adaptive sports provide inclusion for those who might otherwise be alienated in the world of sports
- Adaptive sports can improve the physical and mental quality of life for participants
- Adaptive sports can be a catalyst for participants to become more actively engaged in their own health process.
- Adaptive sports can provide participants with a sense of community and belonging (Isidoro-Cabañas et al., 2023; Hall, 2024)

Occupational Therapy and Adaptive Sports

- OTs understand how to best adapt the sport and equipment to best fit the needs of their clients to help target goals
- OTs understand the importance of participating in sports and play activities and their impact on their patients
- OTs can assist their patients in choosing sports that are meaningful for them and help them search for sports in their area
- OTs can help integrate adaptive sports into treatment sessions (especially in schools)
(Hall, 2024; Bullen & Clarke, 2020)

Sports that Can be Adapted

Many popular sports can be adapted for individuals or there may even be leagues for a fully adapted sport such as wheelchair basketball. Here are some common adapted sports:



Wheelchair Basketball

Participants must have a permanent lower extremity disability that precludes them from playing competitive stand up basketball.



Sitting Volleyball

Players use both their arms and legs to move across the court. They must remain in contact with the floor at all times.



Wheelchair Tennis

Wheelchair tennis is played on the same tennis courts and uses the same rackets, balls, and other equipment.



Track and Field

Participants run alongside a seeing guide who helps them along the track/path. Runner can hold onto a tether or their guide.



Wheelchair Soccer

Participants can use a manual or powerchair to push the ball around the playing area. An attachment is placed around the foot rest.



Aquatics

Those with amputations, visual impairments, or special needs can participate in adaptive aquatics and swimming.

Bullen, D., & Clarke, C. (2020). Occupational therapists' experiences of enabling people to participate in Sport. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 84(11), 703–712. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308022620973944>

de Lima, P. B., & Alves, A. C. (2020). An intervention of occupational therapy in parasports using the matching person and technology model: A case study. *Work*, 67(4), 881–893. <https://doi.org/10.3233/wor-203339>

Hall, C. (2024, January 29). OT and Adaptive Sports. *Occupational Therapy Toolkit*. <https://www.ottoolkit.com/blog/ot-and-adaptive-sports/>

Isidoro-Cabañas, E., Soto-Rodríguez, F. J., Morales-Rodríguez, F. M., & Pérez-Mármol, J. M. (2023). Benefits of adaptive sport on physical and mental quality of life in people with physical disabilities: A meta-analysis. *Healthcare*, 11(18), 2480. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11182480>