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“Fitness for people with inhibitors”

with Strength and Conditioning Specialist and Chairperson of the Irish Haemophilia Society Mr John Stack

DEBUNKING THE MYTH ABOUT FITNESS FOR PWI

How would you deconstruct the myth that fitness/sports is not compatible with haemophilia and inhibitors?

It comes down to your definition of fitness and what it is that you hope to do.

Certainly, our younger population need to be taken in one context and our older population in a different context, as well as the history of treatment that we have had should be kept in mind.

For PWH it has been perceived that we should not exercise, because the risk of bleeding is high and so on. However, there is a research showing benefit of doing exercise being also in fewer bleeds. So, there is research backing this, but somehow it got into our mentality that we should not! **Maybe 30 or 40 years ago it was a valid belief, but nowadays it is more and more important that you are active every day, at least for a while.**

Ideally, we should get 30 minutes of activity every day.

Then it brings us to the question – **how do I get those 30 minutes when I have to go to school, I have to go to work, I have kids, and this and that?** It is a bit like medicine that you need to decide that you are going to assign the time. That can be three 10-minute slots throughout the day, it does not have to be 30 minutes at once. **Whatever works to get your heart rate up and to move your joints to full range of motion** (whatever it may be for you).

There are a lot of good reasons to exercise.

It **helps maintain good cardio-vascular fitness** so that the heart pumps blood around the body really well and the lungs provide body with oxygen.

It **helps build strength**. This is especially important as we get older, because more strength is associated with fewer falls. And we all know that the falls are problematic. In very old population a broken pelvis often leads to death. So, having an element of strength helps people resist falling. You need to have a good joint range of motion – and this is probably where the problems start to arise for PWI – in order to facilitate having that type of strength.

Having an active lifestyle does not mean that one has to do structured sport or attend the gym, or anything specific.

How you live your life can contribute to having an activity in your life that is beneficial for you.

Walking is probably the easiest thing to do. Of course, I appreciate the challenge of the PWI to walk, but ordinarily you should be able to walk for part of the day. It can be cumulative – if you need to go to the shop and the shop is not far away, you don't drive to the shop – you walk. That is a really practical way of doing it.

Or go for a walk in the park, look at the butterflies, look for biodiversity in the city around you! It is really important! There is a whole research about it, how walking among the trees make you feel so much better than walking in the city.

If you have a pet dog, you need to **walk the dog**. So get a dog :)

Housework! I remember a woman I knew years ago in the gym. She struggled to lose weight, and I thought that she was another one who gave up. And then I met her about a year later, and she was completely transformed. I asked what did she do and she replied that she started cleaning her house – doing her hoovering, scrubbing and washing by herself – and that was her physical activity. As a result, she lost a lot of weight. She does not have to go to a gym any more.

For us as a community it might not be the easiest thing to access a gym or to have a structured fitness programme. Therefore, the more active our daily lives are the more we are benefiting from that.

