



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults with Spinal Cord Injury

HAMILTON, Ont. March 17, 2011 – Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) were released today by McMaster University, in partnership with SCI Action Canada and the Rick Hansen Institute. The Guidelines, the first evidence-based ones of their kind, state that to improve fitness, healthy adults with SCI should participate in at least 20 minutes of moderate-vigorous aerobic activity two times per week, as well as strength training exercises two times per week.

Daily physical activity levels among people with SCI are generally lower than those of the able-bodied population, especially among women, older adults, people with less recent injuries, and understandably among people with more severe injuries. All healthy adults with SCI – due to traumatic or non-traumatic causes – are encouraged to participate in a variety of physical activities that are enjoyable and safe, as they are able.

“We know that physical activity plays such a vital role in overall health and the loss of fitness and independence associated with physical inactivity greatly impacts quality of life and community participation,” said Dr. Kathleen Martin Ginis, Professor and Health and Exercise Psychology Director, with the Department of Kinesiology at McMaster University. “For adults with SCI, our message is simple – physical activity matters!”

The leading causes of death among people with SCI are chronic diseases that are often related to physical inactivity, such as heart disease or type 2 diabetes. “Lack of physical conditioning due to SCI is also linked to an increased risk for chronic secondary health complications, such as pain and pressure ulcers,” said Amir Rasheed, Director of Best Practices and Implementation for the Rick Hansen Institute. “Having practical Guidelines to support clinicians and exercise programmers in prescribing and promoting exercise will go a long way to helping reduce the likelihood that people with SCI will experience these types of secondary complications.”

The Guidelines recommend a wide variety of aerobic and strength training activities that are appropriate for people with SCI. Aerobic activities such as arm cycling, body weight supported treadmill walking or water exercise, or strength training exercises using weights or elastic resistance bands will help get the heart rate up, improve strength and prevent muscle atrophy.

“Physical activity is something people with SCI are always looking for information and guidance on, they want to know what they have to do to achieve the health benefits associated with physical activity” said Spero Ginis, Knowledge Translation Specialist, with SCI Action Canada. “Today is an important milestone as these evidence-based guidelines will inform the promotion and prescription of physical activity for Canadians with SCI.”

Spinal cord injury affects an estimated 86,000 individuals living in Canada and the numbers of SCI cases are projected to *increase* over the next two decades affecting an estimated 121,000 people by 2030.

The Guidelines were developed by an expert panel from across Canada, led by researchers at McMaster University, with support from the Rick Hansen Institute, and in partnership with SCI Action Canada. Development of the Guidelines followed a rigorous and internationally accepted, consensus approach to guideline development. The new Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults with SCI can be found online and are available on SCI Action Canada's website: www.sciactioncanada.ca/guidelines.

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About the Rick Hansen Institute:

The Rick Hansen Institute (RHI) is a Canadian-based not-for-profit organization committed to accelerating the translation of discoveries and best practices into improved treatments for people with spinal cord injuries. It does this by leading the collaboration of researchers, health care professionals and service providers across Canada and internationally. For more information, visit: www.rickhanseninstitute.org.

About McMaster University:

McMaster University (www.mcmaster.ca), one of four Canadian universities listed among the Top 100 universities in the world, is renowned for its innovation in both learning and discovery. It has a student population of 23,000, and more than 140,000 alumni in 128 countries.

About SCI Action Canada:

Based at McMaster University, SCI Action Canada is an ongoing, collaborative endeavor bringing together university-based researchers, knowledge mobilization specialists, support networks, service groups and community members focused on advancing physical activity, knowledge and participation among Canadians living with spinal cord injury.

For more information, to schedule an interview or speak to a spokesperson, please contact:

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