



In The Field

Comprehensive, cooperative and educational, FUNfitness is the physical therapy component of Healthy Athletes. Designed to assess and improve an athlete's flexibility, functional strength, aerobic capacity and balance, these examinations also educate participants, families and coaches and provide hands-on opportunities for participants to learn about physical therapy and fitness. Athletes and their families receive educational literature, including a personal "fitness report card" illustrating techniques to improve flexibility, functional strength and balance and aerobic condition for sports performance and daily activities.

The FUNfitness curriculum was originally developed for Special Olympics Healthy Athletes by the American Physical Therapy Association.

IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT:

FUNfitness examinations have found that a large percentage of Special Olympics athletes have additional health related concerns.

49% flexibility problems identified
38% have balance problems
29% strength problems identified

Globally 54% of Special Olympics athletes perform some sort of physical activity three or more days most weeks, a rate higher than others with disabilities.

GOALS:

1. Improve athletes' ability to train and compete in Special Olympics and improve the overall fitness of people with intellectual disabilities.
2. Train health care professionals, students and others about the needs and care management of people with intellectual disabilities.
3. Collect, analyze and disseminate data on the health and fitness status and needs of people with intellectual disabilities.
4. Advocate for improved health and wellness policies and programs for people with intellectual disabilities.

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Hanna Lagerqvist from Sweden spends most of her time in a wheelchair due to Cerebral palsy, but her Special Olympics sport – equestrian – is acting as a physical therapy tool for her.

Because the horse's body is both wide and warm, it is helping to loosen the muscles in her lower body and holding on to the horse is helping her develop upper body strength and conditioning. When Hanna visited the Healthy Athletes FUNfitness venue, she amazed the volunteers there by being able to walk and even run for short distances.

"The exercises will make her more comfortable, and as she gets older, will ensure that her physical condition does not get worse," said Patricia Meegan, a physical therapist working with FUNfitness. **"If she can work at it, she can become more flexible. She is not destined to stay like this. Her life is a process of recovery, and she can get better – just look at what she can already do."**

Hanna's coach, Ulrika von Knorring, said she is also constantly impressed with what Hanna can do. **"They told her parents at birth that she would never walk, so seeing her here is great."**

