



## Practice Alert

# Lifestyle risk factors

July 2021

This practice alert was prepared by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, as a joint publication with the NDIS Commission.

## Key points

- People with disability have a right to the highest attainable standard of health, and a right to choice and control regarding personal lifestyle and daily activities.
- Participant's should be encouraged and supported to achieve lifestyle changes that will match their own health and wellbeing goals.
- The keys to reducing lifestyle risks include eating healthier food, increasing exercise and connection with others, while reducing stress, too much weight, alcohol and stopping smoking.
- Providers are required to support participant's to make informed choices, exercise control and maximise their independence in relation to the supports provided.

## Why lifestyle is important

People with disability are more likely to have poor physical and mental health. This includes conditions such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, cancer, diabetes, oral diseases, depression and anxiety. These health conditions may be a direct result of, or made worse, by lifestyle risk factors such as, poor nutrition, obesity, smoking, alcohol intake and lack of exercise.

## What are lifestyle factors?

Lifestyle factors are ways in which we live that can be changed or modified to improve health. Examples of lifestyle factors that can improve health are nutrition, physical activity, adequate sleep, reducing stress, anxiety, alcohol intake and stopping smoking.

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Loneliness and isolation are also lifestyle risk factors. For instance, the lack of a job, friends or hobbies can lead to many hours spent alone without purpose or connection.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) estimates that 72% of people with a disability in Australia are inactive compared to 52% of people without a disability. This means that the majority of people with a disability are not exercising or joining in community-based activities.

## How can lifestyle risks be addressed?

Lifestyle risks can be addressed by eating healthy food, increasing exercise, reducing stress and connecting with others. For instance, reducing the amount of takeaway food eaten, choosing food and drinks low in added sugar, increasing movement throughout the day and becoming involved in a community activity that will create connection with others.

People with disability may not have had the opportunity to access or control their living environment. For instance choice of food, daily activities, exercise and community participation.

Changes to lifestyle happen through raising awareness, setting goals for change, changes to the living environment and learning the new skills that may be needed; some of the specific interventions that will create change are outlined below.

### Raising awareness through health promotion

Health promotion is the provision of information about how everyday activities can effect health. This information raises health awareness and give ideas of how to make lifestyle changes that will address risks such as obesity, high blood pressure and stress management.

### Setting goals for change

Setting small achievable goals for change such as walking short distances, not taking sugar in coffee or tea will gradually build to bigger goals.

### Learning with peer support

Joining with others who have the same goals can also address lifestyle risks, such as walking with friends, physical training with a group, joining a community garden, water aerobics or participating in a walkathon or fun run. To increase connection with others, joining an art class, music or dancing lessons will assist.

### Changing the living environment

Lifestyle risks can be reduced by making changes to the environment that can support goals. These changes can be small such as having healthy food choices available planning, shopping and cooking healthy meals.

### Encouraging and increasing physical activity

Encouraging positive ideas of physical activity and self-esteem will also assist in motivating change. Many people think that they may not cope with exercise and this prevents them from taking it up. Increasing movement through normal daily activities is a way to start feeling more positive about our bodies and movement.

Increasing physical activity improves health and has a flow on effect to other lifestyle risks such as nutrition, stress and smoking. Exercise will lower blood pressure, improve self-esteem and improve mental health.

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## Supporting participants

Providers are required to monitor participants' health, safety and wellbeing, support participants to maintain their health and to access appropriate health services.

Providers should support participants to be empowered to live a healthy lifestyle and understand why it is important.

Providers can support participants in the following ways:

- incorporate health promotion, and ways to live a healthy lifestyle into support planning
- link actions for a healthy lifestyle to the participant's annual comprehensive assessment
- provide support to make informed decisions regarding their own lifestyle. This includes support to:
  - understand any risks arising from their present lifestyle
  - understand how they can improve their lifestyle to match their own health goals
  - talk to their GP about their health and what lifestyle changes are needed to optimise their health
- facilitate choice in lifestyle changes and understanding about their own health, using accessible tools and resources
- engage the participant with encouragement and highlight their achievements so that they are motivated to develop a healthy lifestyle
- provide information about healthy lifestyles and different ideas to improve health, such as walking instead of driving, learning to cook a new healthy dish or taking up an exercise class
- suggest and support access to new activities or choices that link to the participant's goals and dreams and how a healthy lifestyle may help them achieve this goal
- provide information about and support access to new interests and community activities in the local area such as a community garden, amateur theatre, start a walking group, cooking lessons or arts and crafts
- support the participant to make changes to their living environment that will support their goals, increase incidental exercise around the house, keep healthy food choices in the cupboard, and walk to places when possible
- support to access to information or professional assistance such as dietitians or exercise physiologists where the person's lifestyle choices are inconsistent with their own health goals.

## Referrals to other professionals

Changes to lifestyle can involve changes across different aspects of a participant's life. A multi-disciplinary approach can assist the participant to develop new skills or identify a support need. For instance, identifying an appropriate level and type of exercise or learning how to cook.

The types of professionals that may assist in lifestyle change include dietitians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, exercise physiologists, counsellors and NDIS behaviour support practitioners.

## Training and development

Consider how to increase NDIS workers training and skills in areas such as:

- healthy lifestyles, nutrition and menu planning and exercise
- positive communication skills to engage with participants and empower change.

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## Provider obligations

### NDIS Code of Conduct

Providers and workers must comply with the [NDIS Code of Conduct](#) when providing supports or services to NDIS participants.

The NDIS Code of Conduct requires all NDIS providers and workers who provide NDIS supports or services to NDIS participants to, among other things:

- act with respect for individual rights to freedom of expression, self-determination and decision-making in accordance with applicable laws and conventions
- provide supports and services in a safe and competent manner with care and skill
- promptly take steps to raise and act on concerns about matters that may impact the quality and safety of supports provided to people with disability.

### NDIS Practice Standards

If you are a registered NDIS provider, you must comply with the [National Disability Insurance Scheme \(Provider Registration and Practice Standards\) Rules 2018](#) as part of your conditions of registration. The NDIS Practice Standards relate to the delivery of safe, quality supports and services, and the management of risks associated with the supports you provide to NDIS participants.

In delivering NDIS support and services, providers must also demonstrate compliance with the [National Disability Insurance Scheme \(Quality Indicators\) Guidelines 2018](#). The NDIS Commission's guidance on the [NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators](#) provides a further resource to assist registered NDIS providers to understand their obligations.

The NDIS Practice Standards that are most relevant to this alert include:

- **Support planning:** each participant is actively involved in the development of their support plans. Support plans reflect participant needs, requirements, preferences, strengths, and goals, and are regularly reviewed.
- **Independence and informed choice:** Each participant is supported by the provider to make informed choices, exercise control and maximise their independence relating to the supports provided.
- **Access to supports:** each participant accesses the most appropriate supports that meet their needs, goals and preferences.
- **Incident Management:** Each participant is safeguarded by the provider's incident management system, ensuring that incidents are acknowledged, respond to, well-managed and learned from.
- **Information Management:** Each participant's information is managed to ensure that it is identifiable, accurately recorded, current and confidential. Each participant's information is easily accessible to the participant and appropriately utilised by relevant workers.
- **Human resource management:** each participant's support needs are met by workers who are competent in relation to their role, hold relevant qualifications, and who have relevant expertise and experience to provide person-centred support.

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## Resources

Five-booklet toolkit developed by Inclusion Melbourne to assist people with a disability make choices about their life [my choice tool kit](#)

First Nations People, resource for planning, dreams, goals and lifestyle. First Peoples Disability Network Australia [our way planning resources](#)

[Healthy eating for adults](#) Australian Government Department of Health brochure

Australian dietary guidelines, website links to a range of information and resources [eat for health](#)

[Physical activity and exercise guidelines for all Australians, Australian Government Department of Health](#), include tips and ideas for how to fit more activity into your day-to-day life.

Link for information, initiatives and resources for healthy lifestyles [Preventative Health, Australian Government Department of Health](#)

[Council for Intellectual Disability Health Fact sheets](#) including healthy lifestyles

[Healthy Mind e tool for people with intellectual disability](#) Blackdog Institute

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## General enquiries

**Call: 1800 035 544** (free call from landlines). Our contact centre is open 9.00am to 5.00pm (9.00am to 4.30pm in the NT) Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays.

**Email:** [contactcentre@ndiscommission.gov.au](mailto:contactcentre@ndiscommission.gov.au)

**Website:** [www.ndiscommission.gov.au](http://www.ndiscommission.gov.au)