

DDS Treadmill Use Safety Guidelines

Use of treadmills with individuals with intellectual or developmental disability (I/DD) have become fairly common place. There are a lot of great reasons for this:

- Provides good, weight bearing and aerobic exercise for individuals who may have limited access to walking outside
- Great alternative to walking outside when weather is bad or it is unsafe to do so.
- Improves balance, strength, bone density, digestion, constipation, cardiac health

But treadmills can also cause serious injuries for all. Some common injuries are:

- Severe friction burns to skin when in contact with moving belt
- Sprained or broken wrists, ankles and knee injuries from wearing improper footwear or moving at too rapid a pace for the individual
- Head or back injuries from tripping or falling off treadmill or being propelled off treadmill when speed is accelerated or decelerated too quickly or when stepping on or off a moving belt.

Some key areas of concern that place individuals with I/DD at risk for injury include:

- Balance and gait problems. Individuals with I/DD suffer more falls for their age when compared to the general population. They are more reliant on the use of handrails throughout the exercise session not just for getting on and off the belt.
- Reflexes: Individuals may not be able to problem solve as quickly and react in time. May also have problems with gross and fine motor coordination that can delay their response.
- Their understanding of the risks of treadmill use may be limited or they may be unable to retain safety information or training. They may be more easily distracted.

So what can you do to prevent or limit the severity of injuries sustained by individuals you support while using a treadmill?

All staff and individuals should be trained in the safe use and operation of the treadmill they will be using. This training should include minimally:

- Where the emergency stop switch (red button) is located on the machine
- How to attach the safety cord/operating key device to the individual using the treadmill. This device is designed to completely stop all moving parts of the treadmill if the person falls or steps away when the key becomes disconnected from the machine and automatically cuts off all power to the machine, thus preventing or minimizing injury. ***This device is essential and must be used every time someone uses the treadmill!***
- How the individual will get on or off the machine
- Pace of belt for the individual and length of time they are to use it.
- How to check all safety features before each use.
- How to maintain the machine in good working order.
- How to unplug the machine when not in use. May be necessary to also remove the key.

Important!!

- **At least one staff person should be nearby while the treadmill is in use. This does not mean that a staff person needs to be standing beside the treadmill while it is in use, especially in the case of an individual who can use it independently. But rather, based on the identified needs of the individual, provide an appropriate level of support. For example. if someone is fully independent on the treadmill, ask the individual to inform staff when they will be using it so that the staff can be assured that the safety cord is attached and in working order, they can keep other individuals out of the area who may be at risk for injury, and remain in an area of the house where they could hear if there was a problem and react quickly.**