



Sporting Opportunities



Restricted Growth Association

Working to benefit people with restricted growth and their families



SPORTING OPPORTUNITIES

This booklet is written primarily for people of short stature who are interested in sport, either as participants or as spectators. It answers many of the questions people have about sporting opportunities available to them:

- What has sport got to offer me?
- What sports are suitable for someone with my restricted growth condition?
- How can I get involved in competitive sport with other athletes of similar abilities?
- What practical problems might I have to overcome?
- What opportunities exist to take part in sport as a leisure activity?
- How easy is it to enjoy sport as a spectator?

The benefits of sport

For many people of restricted growth, sport is an important interest. For some, it's more than that – it is a passion. There are plenty of opportunities for children and adults of restricted growth to take part in sport, whether competitively or as a leisure interest.

It may not be possible for people of short stature to compete on equal terms with average-sized people, but for those with a competitive streak, the Dwarf Athletic Association (DAA UK) provides a national network of opportunities (see later). There are also opportunities to compete internationally and represent your country in your chosen sport. Success at the highest levels demands as great a commitment to training and developing skills as for any athlete.

Sport – or at least physical exercise – should be an important part of a healthy lifestyle for anybody whether of short or average stature. It is a good way of keeping your weight down, strengthening your muscles (including the heart) and

improving your stamina. It can also be a way of realising your own personal potential – improving self-esteem as well as being a lot of fun.

6 *My son was picked on at school by another lad who also suffered discrimination, in his case because of his ethnic background. When this other lad saw my son swim, his attitude changed to one of admiration and support.* 9

What sports are suitable?

The most suitable sport for anyone to take up is one they really enjoy doing. Your short stature may impose some limitations, but there are very few sports that someone of short stature cannot or should not pursue. The main limitations are likely to be medical rather than anything else. Activities that are particularly suitable for those who want to exercise at their own pace include walking, golf, cycling and swimming. Swimming is particularly good exercise as the water provides support for



your body weight and reduces the strain on joints. There are also people of short stature who are skilled and enthusiastic in more energetic or competitive sports, such as powerlifting, shotputting or discus-throwing, football, hockey and basketball, to name just a few. Others enjoy 'ride-on' sports, such as horseriding and motor sports.



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6 *I've always been very active and until recently my main form of exercise was aerobics, but I found this quite exhausting. For the last two years I have been heavily involved in line dancing. For people with our height restriction, this is somewhat easier, much more enjoyable and still a good form of exercise. It also puts much less pressure on the joints. Although I do two 3-hour sessions every week, I never get stiff or have muscle problems.* 9

It is important to be aware of any medical issues that might limit

sports you choose. Many restricted growth conditions mean that those affected are prone to joint and back problems, especially in later life, and certain types of sport can make these sorts of problems worse. These include high-impact sports and exercise, such as jogging or trampolining.

Sports injuries (such as twisted knees, torn ligaments or broken bones) can also take their toll later in life, e.g. by making arthritis worse, so it may be advisable for some people to avoid situations where these are more likely to occur, e.g. highly competitive sports where the temptation is to push the body as far as possible.

Specific restricted growth conditions may impose other limitations. For example, people with SED, diastrophic dysplasia and pseudoachondroplasia may be affected by instability of the neck bones and should not participate in competitive contact sports, such as rugby or judo.

The **What is...?** series of booklets produced by the Restricted Growth Association (RGA) summarise the main medical factors that may limit the kind of activity that people with

a particular condition can do – refer to the booklet relevant to you.

Above all, however, you should be guided by your own medical history.

Warming up

Anyone taking part in sport or exercise should take care to warm up properly beforehand. Many sports injuries (especially muscle and ligament injuries) are caused by people putting too much strain too quickly on their bodies. Any session of exercise should start with at least 10–15 minutes of stretching and flexing to warm up the parts of the body being exercised. This is particularly important for people with a restricted growth condition. Any strenuous exercise should only be undertaken when the body is fully warmed up. And remember that if you take a break during a session of exercise, you should warm up again at the end of the break before starting to exercise again.

Practicalities

Some sports or leisure activities may present practical obstacles that have to be overcome, such as the need for specially adapted equipment.

Adaptations to sporting equipment

For some sports, the standard equipment needs to be adapted to suit your body dimensions.

For cyclists, adjustments need to be made to their cycles. The **Lifestyles** booklet, *Bikes, Trikes and Ride-on Toys* contains more details about the types of adaptations needed and how to get them done. It may be preferable to get a bike made to fit you. This is expensive, but you could pursue a claim for the Mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance. Your local Social Services may also suggest sources of funding. (The Benefits Agency has a confidential telephone advice line which can offer general advice on Disability Living Allowance: tel 0800 882200.)

Shorter tennis and badminton racquets are easily obtainable from sports shops, as are smaller sized balls for basketball and volleyball. Golfers will need to have clubs shortened to take account of their height and reach. Badminton is an ideal game for people with restricted growth as the flight of the shuttle gives more time to move about the court than either tennis or squash.



Basketball played to mini-basketball rules is more satisfactory for teams of players with restricted growth as the basket rim is 8 ft 6 ins high, compared to 10 ft.

This makes it less of a heave to score and it retains the fluidity of the game.

Volleyball rules have also been adapted for teams of people with restricted growth.

For table tennis, platforms are provided to enable players to reach the table. A milk crate (or beer crate!) is useful for pool and snooker and other table games.

For field athletics throwing events (shot putt, discus and javelin), implements of appropriate size and weight should be used so that they can be handled safely and effectively.

6 *I became interested in horse riding. The main problem here is the length of the stirrup leathers, so I bought my own and when I ride, just swap them over. Now, apart from a much-needed leg-up, I can manage as well as anyone else. Because of my leg length, I tend to use up a lot more energy, but as I have been riding a while, I have the experience and stamina to overcome this. 9*

Learning to swim

Everyone finds it easier to learn to swim as a child and this is particularly so for people with some restricted growth conditions where disproportion increases with age. Encourage children to become used to putting their faces in the water. Then, when they are learning to breathe to the side when doing front crawl, they will find it easier. Otherwise they may raise their head to breathe to the front which causes the legs to sink and reduces the forward movement. Forward momentum can be aided by the use of flippers (although some pools do not like people to use them during public sessions). This compensates for the lack of leg length and prevents sinking while the swimmer learns the stroke and practises breathing.

Note that young children with achondroplasia are prone to developing an ear problem called glue ear (see the booklet *What is Achondroplasia?*). This is treated with grommets (little tubes that sit in the eardrum). If your child has grommets fitted it is important not to get water in the ears. They may still be able to swim with specially made ear plugs available from the ENT department of the local hospital.

For very young children, arm bands that are small enough to allow arm movement may not give enough buoyancy to keep the child's mouth out of the water. Using a partly inflated small size ring or a buoyancy vest with pockets for floats may be a better option. Some young children may not be comfortable swimming on their backs as this leads to a 'stranded beetle' feeling. By the age of 4 or 5 they should be strong and well-coordinated enough to overcome this. Care should also be taken when swimming backstroke competitively if the arms are not long enough to reach above the head to prevent the head from hitting the end of the pool first.

Pools with a bar attached to the side at water level present a particular risk.

Most people with restricted growth are able to swim all the recognised strokes although bowing of the legs can cause problems with breaststroke where the ASA (Amateur Swimming Association) Law is very precise. Careful attention to the leg kick can usually overcome any risk of disqualification, but if bowing is severe a doctor's letter explaining this to the chief judge may help.



School Sports

School Sports Days can be upsetting or uncomfortable for parents and children alike if the school has not given enough thought to how a child with restricted growth might experience the event. No one wants to watch their child always come last, but giving children of short stature a big head start, e.g. in races on the track, can also be embarrassing as it puts the spotlight on the child's stature.

6 *My son found his forte in the obstacle race. There is not so much speed that counts as agility and Sam is quicker than most of the other children at getting through hoops, and so on. Quickness of reaction more than compensates for his lack of speed. I was pleased to find that Sam was always one of the first to be picked when teams were chosen. 9*

Sporting awards

Many schools and clubs work towards awards that show a level of achievement in certain activities,

e.g. '10 step award' in primary schools. Attainment levels may need to be scaled down for a child with restricted growth, but it is important that they are still seen to present a challenge. At the Dwarf Athletic Association's Games (see below), children as young as 2 years can compete in running and throwing events and the results from these could be used to set appropriate targets in other contexts.

As competition at school becomes more unbalanced, pupils should still be encouraged to fulfil their potential. They should be made aware of the other opportunities to compete in their favourite sports with fairer competition, both at the DAA UK Games and at other disabled sporting events. Access to these is through DAA UK or a local sports club for the disabled. Learning to score or officiate is also a way of staying involved with competitive sport at school.

The Dwarf Athletic Association UK

The Dwarf Athletic Association (DAA) UK is an organisation whose mission is:



6 *to make regular sporting opportunity accessible and enjoyable to anyone and everyone of restricted growth in the United Kingdom, regardless of their location, sporting ability or financial support.* 9

Membership is open to people of disproportionate restricted growth who are less than, or equal to, 5 feet in height and to people of proportionate restricted growth less than, or equal to, 4 feet 10 inches. The DAA UK aims to make people of restricted growth more aware of their own personal potential for enjoyment and achievements in a variety of sports. It also encourages them to join local clubs and go to leisure centres.

The DAA UK also provides opportunities for competitive sports in several ways:

- through its programme of regional training events, designed to help sportsmen and women develop the skills to compete safely and successfully
- by staging an annual National Games, open to all persons of restricted growth, from the age of 2 upwards – athletes compete according to age and gender, and in open events may be

- classified by body proportions
- by developing links with other national sporting bodies, such as the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) and Disability Sport England (DSE).
- by providing opportunities for British athletes to compete with athletes of restricted growth from other countries, especially in events such as the World Dwarf Games, held every four years (hosted by the DAA UK in 1997), and the Paralympic and World Disabled Games.

At the moment the DAA UK National Games caters for 11 sports:

- track athletics
- field athletics
- badminton
- basketball
- boccia (Italian bowls)
- football
- hockey
- powerlifting
- swimming
- table tennis
- volleyball.

Competitions are held under the rules of the national sporting bodies, modified for athletes of restricted growth where necessary. They are officiated by qualified

referees and umpires. Adaptations of equipment and playing areas, (e.g. smaller pitches and courts) are sometimes used, but are not obligatory.

You will find contact details for DAA UK at the end of this booklet.

Joining a sports club

A good way of pursuing an interest in sport is by joining a sports club. They are not full of élite performers, so you need not be afraid to go along.

Sports clubs for the disabled cater for a very wide spectrum of disability – you just need to be willing to work alongside other people with physical problems. If you join a club, the opportunities for competition will be greatly widened. All disabled athletes are classified into profile groups and these groups are then entered into sports-specific classifications, according to athletic ability. People of restricted growth are usually profiled as P25, and P25 becomes S6 in swimming and T40 in athletics. You will then find yourself in competition with athletes of like abilities.

6 When I was 8 years old, the physiotherapist suggested that I went along to my local disabled sports club to get some training so that I could compete in the Stoke Mandeville Mini Games. At this stage I did not think of myself as being disabled. I went to the Games and won my race, something I'd never done before – and I was spotted and asked if I would like to go to the first World Dwarf Games in Chicago, USA! I can honestly say that this changed my life. I am still a member of the club and have many friends. We go away together to compete at national events. The spirit in the club is tremendous – we all support each other and several of us are recognised at national level in different sports – table tennis, wheelchair basketball, javelin, swimming, archery – which reflects the standard of commitment at the club. I look forward to going every Saturday morning. 9

6 I recently tried ice skating and was surprised how well I got to grips with it – people reckon it's our low centre of gravity. It was quite tiring, but I can keep my balance without touching the sides. It's great fun



and I would recommend it to anyone, but it does put pressure on the joints, especially the knees, so you must take care. 9

For more information on regional and national sports events, and for details of sports clubs for the disabled, contact the relevant national body (addresses at the end of this booklet).

Enjoying sport as a spectator

Anyone who supports a particular team or individual – whether football, cricket, tennis, netball, hockey or whatever – knows what passions sport can arouse. Many people of restricted growth derive pleasure from sport not as participants, but as spectators or fans. While television coverage can always provide a grandstand seat, others prefer the excitement of being at the venue.

For people of short stature, there can be problems in getting a clear sight of the action.

6 I have found that at virtually all the football matches I have been to, most fans are very accommodating to my size and I have not had that many problems seeing the action. Sometimes

I am able to swap seats with fans at the front if I am a long way back and can't see properly. 9

It is often worthwhile contacting a venue in advance to find out what arrangements they would be prepared to make for you. Most will be helpful about giving you tickets near the front. There may also be a section for disabled people, or a family section designed for adults with children which you can use to get a good view. You may find that some venues are inflexible about who can use these sections, i.e. have particular definitions of what 'disabled' means.

6 Some venues seem to classify disabled people as being either wheelchair-bound or blind. On the odd occasion I have had to use a wheelchair to gain access to a disabled section. A means to an end! 9

If you find you come up against inflexible rules, it is often worth being persistent and making a fuss. It can often pay dividends to go to the top.

6 At the team I support, I have managed to get season tickets in their family section after a lot of letter writing to the club chairman. 9

Sources of help

For more information on joining a sports club, membership of DAA UK and how it might be able to help you, contact:

Dwarf Athletic Association UK
c/o 44 Middlecroft Road
Stourton Grange
Leeds LS10 4QZ
Tel: 0113 270 3791

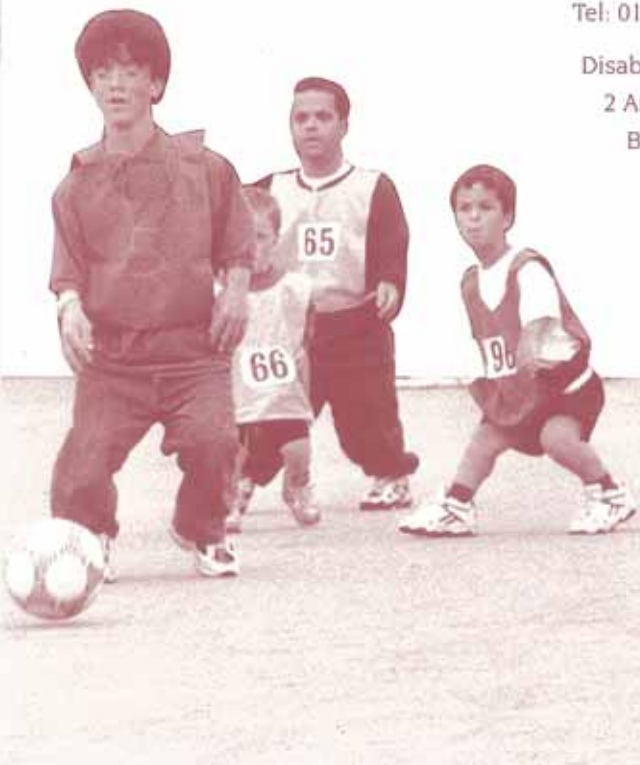
For more information on regional and local sports events, and for details of sports clubs for the disabled, contact the relevant national body:

Disability Sport England
Solecast House
13-27 Brunswick Place
London N1 6DX
Tel: 0171 490 4919

Welsh Sports Association for the Disabled
21 Kier Hardie Terrace
Swffryd
Crumlin
Newport
Gwent NP1 5EJ
Tel: 01495 248861

Scottish Sports Association for the Disabled
(contact Margaret McPhee)
Tel: 01592 415700

Disability Action
2 Annandale Avenue
Belfast BT7 3JH
Tel: 01232 491011



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The RGA encourages members to share information and sources of help.

Other RGA publications

What is...?

The **What is...?** series looks at particular restricted growth conditions or issues. The titles in this series are:

Achondroplasia
 Hypochondroplasia
 Pseudoachondroplasia
 SED
 Diastrophic dysplasia
 Rarer syndromes

Lifestyles

The **Lifestyles** series focuses on particular aspects of living with a restricted growth condition. The other titles in this series are:

Babies and the Early Years
 Going to School
 The Teenage Years
 Careers, Employment and Education
 Having a Baby
 Adoption
 The Later Years
 Driving a Car
 Bikes, Trikes and Ride-on Toys
 What Shall I Wear?
 Limb Surgery
 Personal Hygiene



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