

*"I took part in athletics and still hold the national record in long jump. I also did judo, which helped with my disability by learning about balance and how to fall. I focused on swimming as it got too much to do all sports, and I had more of a talent in swimming."*

Sascha Kindred, Paralympic multiple gold medallist

Sport is fun, stimulating and opens a range of opportunities from fitness, recreation to competition. Not only are there health benefits to participating in a sport but the friendships made are also invaluable. The aim of this information sheet is to tell you more about these benefits so that you choose what is best for your child to get active.

From the surveys conducted by HemiHelp in 2008, we discovered that our members of all ages are involved in a wide range of different sports and physical activities, most of them in mainstream settings.

## Early Years

At this age, children may be getting lots of physiotherapy, both with a therapist and at home, but their physical and social development can benefit from active play in groups such as Tumble Tots. Parents are sometimes inclined to be overprotective, but as long as the activity is well supervised and the play workers know about the child's hemiplegia there should not be a problem joining in.

You will probably find early years activities at your local park, leisure centre, school, and your Local Authority may have a scheme allowing children with a disability free or cheaper entry.

*"H (aged 3) enjoys swimming and I've found that this loosens her up really well, she has made us so proud passing Duckling 1 and 2 awards."*

## 4 - 11

Once they are at school, children often may get less Physio and OT, although if they go to a special school there may be therapists on the staff. And in mainstream regular therapy may be written into a Statement if they have one. The physio-therapist may also visit to make an assessment and advise school staff of how best to develop their physical skills.

But in any case, at this age it falls more to family to keep them exercising – or perhaps active might be a better word here, because they will be more and more unwilling to do anything that smacks of therapy. Fortunately, during the primary school years children with hemiplegia can keep up with their classmates in many activities.

Most children with hemiplegia can partake in a multitude of sports, such as swimming or cycling – two skills that will not only help keep them fit and strengthen their muscles, but will make it easier for them to mix with others of their age.

Some may continue to need stabilisers or prefer a three-wheeler (it may be possible to get a specialised bike through an OT or a charity – see links below). HemiHelp also has a leaflet about learning to cycle and where to find a suitable bike.

“He rides a bicycle with ordinary stabilisers, goes to gymnastics, is having private swimming lessons, and we encourage walking everywhere (parent of 5 year old).”

“My daughter can’t ride a bike, so we bought her a go-cart which she uses to exercise her legs.”

“B likes us going out as a family on our bikes. As she is unable to ride a bike on her own we have a tandem.”

The HemiHelp survey showed that children in this age group were involved in an amazing range of activities, including:

- football
- swimming
- cycling
- sailing
- horse riding
- dance
- tennis
- table tennis
- martial arts
- gymnastics
- trampolining

Many are also active in youth organisations such as Cubs, Brownies, Woodcraft Folk etc. Some sporting activities, notably riding, tended to happen in disabled settings, but most young members were at least partly in mainstream.

## Fun Days

A lot of children have been introduced to their chosen sport/activity by attending one of the Fun Days held by HemiHelp around the UK. They aim to give a taster of things which they may never have thought of trying, or may have been put off because other children might laugh at their efforts. Finding a sport or other activity that they enjoy not only promotes fitness and well being but boosts their confidence. And of course all these activities are also opportunities to make new friends. Other life skills are also picked up on these days for example by sharing notes with each other participants can learn how to tie shoe laces.

“D took up squash after a Fun Day, which he now plays at a local club and as part of a school team. He also played tennis for the first time at a Fun day which gave him confidence to play at his secondary school too.”

“Give them opportunities to do things even if you know that they will only achieve a little. We took S to a climbing wall when he was about 6 because he desperately wanted to have a go. The instructor was great. He got about 3 feet off the ground but thought it was marvellous and still talks about the experience.”

Some adult members have recommended activities that helped them develop balance and coordination, which many children with hemiplegia have difficulties with.

“I would tell any child with hemiplegia that judo is a great sport to help with balance.” (Sascha Kindred)

“Trampolining has helped me by keeping me active, helping me coordinate my body, including my affected side, in order to be able to do specific moves, and allows me to work towards mastering more complicated moves in the long run. It is also a really fun way to keep fit!

I began taking ballet lessons when I was eight. Ballet taught me to use my left side to the best of my ability. I began to learn how to coordinate my movements and move the side that barely seemed to exist. It also helped with my balance training so this meant less falls. I also think that dance lessons helped to balance the movements of both sides of the body to the point where my hemiplegia is not as noticeable as in the past.”

Of course success in all these activities depends on finding the right place to do it, and unfortunately not all teachers/instructors are sensitive enough to provide a positive experience.

"E used to do riding lessons but got put off when she saw someone being thrown. Also the riding instructors weren't always sympathetic to the fact that she has hemiplegia. She also participated in ballet lessons but got disheartened when her friends were all entered for exams and she wasn't!"

There were quite a few comments like this in the parents' survey, so you may need to shop around to find the right setting for your child. Some dance schools, for example, will accommodate children with disabilities, and some exam boards (e.g. IDTA) make allowances for them. And many families have had better experiences.

"She goes to Gym club, ballet, dance class, swimming lessons. All in mainstream settings but I have told teachers about her hemiplegia and they do modify what they ask her to do."

"He has 1to1 swimming, as they could not accommodate him in classes. Since then he has done extremely well. The local authority, who run the swimming centre went halves with me on 1to1 lessons due to his disability. Otherwise it would have been too expensive."

## 11-16

This is a time of great changes – primary to secondary school, childhood to puberty to young adulthood. It is a time when appearances become more important and differences more noticeable, and when a young person is likely to become more self-conscious about his or her hemiplegia. Nevertheless it is clear that HemiHelp members continue to take part in the sports and activities they began in childhood, and widen their range to include new interests such as snooker, tenpin bowling, badminton, squash and golf. One member mentions Scottish dancing, another line dancing.

"He plays football at Gloucestershire FA Disability Centre of Excellence. My daughter was 6 weeks old when I was told she would not walk or talk. Last year she was a national swimming champion with 3 medals. Riding - this is her passion. She goes every week and is a stable hand in the holidays (paid work). This is where she has made friends, and it has been wonderful for her balance and mobility."

It must however be said that sport at this age tends to become more competitive, and it therefore becomes more difficult to keep up with non disabled people. For competitively minded teenagers, there are more and more opportunities to continue to develop and compete in a disabled setting. The international success of HemiHelp members in football, swimming, riding and cycling, along with the general boost given to disability sport by media coverage of the 2008 Beijing Paralympics, mean a new generation of sportsmen and women coming along to show that having hemiplegia needn't mean staying on the side-lines. All sporting National Governing Bodies (NGB) have a detailed structure/pathway for the disabled athlete wishing to go further in their sporting career.

"I swim competitively at national and international level through British Swimming. My aim is to compete at 2012 Paralympics I was told R may never walk but he plays football for England and has been around the world."

Of course only a few will reach, or want to reach, the Paralympic heights, but in general opportunities are growing to continue sport locally, possibly moving from a mainstream to a disability setting. Some young people who have managed so far in mainstream and don't see themselves as disabled are unwilling to go down this road though. Some areas have integrated sports facilities where everyone can take part to their own ability; otherwise, they should be encouraged to find another activity which is less physically challenging or competitive but will still help keep them fit.

Some have found that youth organisations and award schemes combine interesting activity with good disability awareness and an inclusive approach:

"Scouts has been fantastic - disability no problem, safe/structured environment. He has just been to Germany for 6 nights and is going on a 5 night watersports course in May half term - they have adapted boats if needed. Scouts has helped in so many ways - especially self confidence."

"The thing I am proudest of is my Gold Duke of Edinburgh's award. This award is designed so anyone can take part, so for example I went on an expedition with other people with Special Needs because with my hemiplegia and also hip problems I can't walk long distances."

## For the whole family

Finally, in this technological world anyone of any age can stare at a screen and get fit at the same time!

"We bought a Nintendo Wii Fit earlier this year. My son (age 11) with hemiplegia loves the balance games, and plays them as part of his physio. He is not much good at the hula hoop, but is great at the table tilt and balance bubble. It is difficult to know if his balance has improved but he is certainly more aware of it and how to transfer weight from one side to the other. He takes longer to learn the games than others, but gets there in the end. And it is great fun. The Wii has been our best buy this year as the remotes are used with just one hand, and he can play a lot of games on equal terms with his friends.

We discovered the Wii Fit and what a revelation! It has a number of incredibly useful exercises to encourage weight bearing on both sides. There is a skiing slalom game, snowboard slalom, aerobic step, yoga exercises and various balance games where you have to shift your weight from one side to the other to get balls down holes and penguins to catch fish. We found this was an excellent way to get T to do things to strengthen his leg muscles after surgery and, funnily, we never had to bribe him to get on with it."

It is equally important for young people to stay active when they grow into adulthood. HemiHelp has a separate information sheet, **Staying Active**, for adults with hemiplegia.

## Useful Addresses

### General Sports Bodies

**Ableize** [www.ableize.com/recreation-sports/](http://www.ableize.com/recreation-sports/) is the sports page of this online disability directory

**Cerebral Palsy Sport (CP Sport)** [www.cpsport.org](http://www.cpsport.org) Tel: 0115 925 7027 Email: [info@cpsport.org](mailto:info@cpsport.org) This organisation covers England and Wales and caters for children from age 8 through into adulthood, arranging national and regional events in various sports including athletics, boccia, swimming, tennis and many others. In addition, they can help you find sports groups in your local area that will cater for your child's needs. Call them to find out about events and groups in your area.

**English Federation of Disability Sport** [www.efds.co.uk](http://www.efds.co.uk) Tel: 0150 922 7750 Email: [federation@efds.co.uk](mailto:federation@efds.co.uk) The EFDS is the national federation for all those organisations which represent disabled people in sport in England. It has a regional manager in each of the ten regions of England who co-ordinates sports provision for people with a disability in that region.

**Disability Sports NI** [www.dsni.co.uk](http://www.dsni.co.uk) Tel: 02890 387 062 Email: [email@dsni.co.uk](mailto:email@dsni.co.uk)

**Scottish Disability Sport** [www.scottishdisabilitysport.com](http://www.scottishdisabilitysport.com) Tel: 0131 317 1130 Email: [admin@scottishdisabilitysport.com](mailto:admin@scottishdisabilitysport.com)

**The Federation of Disability Sport Wales** [www.disabilitysportwales.org](http://www.disabilitysportwales.org) Tel: 0845 846 0021 Email: [office@fdsw.org.uk](mailto:office@fdsw.org.uk)

**Parasport** [www.parasport.org.uk](http://www.parasport.org.uk) Tel: 020 7842 5789 Email: [info@parasport.org.uk](mailto:info@parasport.org.uk) has contact details for all sport bodies in the UK, both national and local, which provide opportunities for people with disabilities.

**Sportability** [www.sportability.org.uk](http://www.sportability.org.uk) Tel: 020 8959 0089 Email: [info@sportability.org](mailto:info@sportability.org) Sportability is a charity dedicated to people with disabilities. They arrange year-round activities including archery, canoeing, falconry, fishing etc. They cater for people over the age of 12 and only cover England at present, being particularly active in the Midlands.

**Tumble Tots** [www.tumbletots.com](http://www.tumbletots.com) Tel: 0121 585 7003 Email: [info@tumbletots.com](mailto:info@tumbletots.com) Tumble Tots focuses on children from 0-7 years, encouraging them to play and develop basic skills for life so that they are confident and happy people. This is done with the help of parents/carers and all activities are centred on movement, using brightly coloured Tumble Tots equipment to develop your child's physical agility, balance, co-ordination and climbing skills.

### Athletics

**Special Olympics Great Britain (SOGB)** [www.sogb.org.uk](http://www.sogb.org.uk) Tel: 020 7247 8891 This organisation is a provider of sporting opportunities for people with a learning disability. Their five most popular sports are athletics, swimming, football, gymnastics and bowls, amongst a variety of other activities including winter sports. They have local branches throughout England, Scotland and Wales and accept people of any ability from age 8 upwards. Contact them for more information on activities and clubs in your local area.

### Cycling

See HemiHelp's Cycling sheet for general information. For competitive cycling go to:

**British Cycling** <http://new.britishcycling.org.uk/disability> Tel: 0161 274 2000 Email: [info@britishcycling.org.uk](mailto:info@britishcycling.org.uk)

### Dance

**International Dance Teachers' Association** [www.idta.co.uk](http://www.idta.co.uk) Tel: 01273 685 652 For all types of dance. Click on 'Where Can I Learn to Dance?' or phone for a list of dance schools.

### Football

**Disability Football:** [www.disabilityfootball.co.uk](http://www.disabilityfootball.co.uk) Tel: 01423 867 748 Is a directory of disability football clubs in England, Scotland and Wales.

**Scotland:** [www.scottishfa.co.uk/scottish\\_football.cfm?page=609](http://www.scottishfa.co.uk/scottish_football.cfm?page=609) Tel: 0141 616 6000 Email: [info@scottishfa.co.uk](mailto:info@scottishfa.co.uk)

**N Ireland:** [www.irishfa.com/grassroots/disability-football/](http://www.irishfa.com/grassroots/disability-football/) Tel: 02890 669 559 Email: [acrooks@irishfa.com](mailto:acrooks@irishfa.com)

**Wales:** <http://tinyurl.com/bsj955y> Tel: 01443 844 113 Email: [info@welshfootballtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@welshfootballtrust.org.uk)

### Horse Riding

**Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA)** [www.rda.org.uk](http://www.rda.org.uk) Tel: 0845 658 1082 Email: [info@rda.org.uk](mailto:info@rda.org.uk) This website page provides a list of contact details by region (including Northern Ireland) with a list of links and telephone numbers to some of the county or local groups that provide horse riding opportunities for your child, from simply stroking a horse to having proper riding lessons.

**The Pony Club** [www.pcuk.org](http://www.pcuk.org) Tel: 024 7669 8300 Email: [enquiries@pcuk.org](mailto:enquiries@pcuk.org) This organisation covers all regions in the U.K. including Northern Ireland. Not all branches cater for disabilities.

**Handy Tips:** Using a toggle on the rein of the affected arm to hold onto can help. The toggle is just a piece of smooth wood, much like a coat toggle, with a slit in it for the rein. This can be kept in place with the small rubber rings (for example those used with martingales).

## Martial Arts

**Disability Martial Arts Association** [www.disabilitymartialartsassociation.co.uk](http://www.disabilitymartialartsassociation.co.uk) Tel: 01992 878104. Contact them by phone or email from the website for information on local clubs.

## Swimming

**British Swimming/Amateur Swimming Association (ASA)** <http://tinyurl.com/86qyxbq/> Email: [disability@swimming.org](mailto:disability@swimming.org) British Swimming/ASA is the English national governing body for swimming, with 1,600 affiliated swimming clubs which teach swimming and stroke improvement. To find local contact details for each region on the website, Links Swimming >County Associations.

**N Ireland** contact DSNI (see above)

**SASA (Scotland)** [www.scottishswimming.com/](http://www.scottishswimming.com/) Tel: 01786 466 502 Email: [p.wilson@scottishswimming.com](mailto:p.wilson@scottishswimming.com)

**WASA (Wales)** Tel: 01792 513 636

**Halliwick Association of Swimming Therapy** [www.halliwick.org.uk](http://www.halliwick.org.uk) This is a national association with local affiliated swimming clubs and groups throughout the UK providing a specialised one- to-one programme to teach disabled people swimming and water skills.

**Handy Tips:** Most local pools offer either one-to-one swimming lessons or small group lessons. Also look out for the Swim 21 logo as this means the pool caters for disabled swimmers.

## Swimming aids for children

[www.swimfin.co.uk](http://www.swimfin.co.uk) Tel: 01604 416 916 Email: [info@swimfin.co.uk](mailto:info@swimfin.co.uk) like a shark fin, straps around body

[www.swimshop.co.uk/Alignment-Kickboard-PALIGNMENTKICKBOARD](http://www.swimshop.co.uk/Alignment-Kickboard-PALIGNMENTKICKBOARD) Tel: 01582 562 111 Email: [sales@swimshop.co.uk](mailto:sales@swimshop.co.uk) made of sturdy foam with stabilizing hand strap – for affected hand

## Snow Sports

**NB** You need to declare your child's hemiplegia when buying insurance. HemiHelp's leaflet on holidays & travel lists companies that will insure you.

**British Ski Club for the Disabled** [www.bscd.org.uk](http://www.bscd.org.uk) This organisation caters for people of any age or ability who wish to ski. For details of regions and local clubs phone or email Liz Philpott.

**Disability Snowsport UK** [www.disabilitysnowsport.org.uk](http://www.disabilitysnowsport.org.uk) Tel: 01479 861272 This organisation caters for people of any age or ability who wish to practice snow sports, including skiing and snowboarding. For local groups contact them by phone or email them via the website.

**The Ski 2 Freedom Foundation** <http://ski2freedom.com/en/index> Tel: 0844 855 2303 Email: [info@ski2freedom.com](mailto:info@ski2freedom.com) The Ski 2 Freedom Foundation is non-profit making organisation launched to help people with disabilities enjoy access to all winter sports. You can download The Ski 2 Freedom Guide to Snowsport and Mountain Activities for Disability and Special Needs from their site.

## Tennis

**The Tennis Foundation** <http://www.tennisfoundation.org.uk/> Tel: 0845 872 0522 Email: [disabilitytennis@tennisfoundation.org.uk](mailto:disabilitytennis@tennisfoundation.org.uk) This is a charity that works in association with the Lawn Tennis Association, helping to develop the game. They provide information on various disability tennis programmes and can help you to find a club in your area.

## Water Sports

**British Disabled Water Ski Association (BDWSA)** [www.bdwsa.org/regions.html](http://www.bdwsa.org/regions.html) Tel: 01784 483 664 Email: [info@bdwsa.org](mailto:info@bdwsa.org) Click on Regions for a list of local contact details (Scotland and England only). Heron Lake also has a residential block for longer stays at the lake.

**Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Sailability** [www.rya.org.uk/sailability](http://www.rya.org.uk/sailability) Tel: 0844 556 9550 Email: [sailability@rya.org.uk](mailto:sailability@rya.org.uk) Sailability is a volunteer based organisation (part of a world-wide network) which covers England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Click on 'Where's my Nearest?' to find details of clubs in your area.

## A resource for schools

**Ability vs Ability** [www.abilityvsability.co.uk](http://www.abilityvsability.co.uk) (E-mail: [martin.mansell@nasuwt.net](mailto:martin.mansell@nasuwt.net)) has a sports pack for schools, developed with the NASUWT to promote awareness of disability sport and inclusiveness in society in general.

HemiHelp makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of information in its publications but cannot be held liable for any actions taken based on this information.

Helpline: 0845 123 2372 (Mon-Fri 10am-1pm) / Admin: 0845 120 3713 • Fax: 0845 120 3723 / Email: [support@hemihelp.org.uk](mailto:support@hemihelp.org.uk) / [www.hemihelp.org.uk](http://www.hemihelp.org.uk)

HemiHelp has a range of information sheets for both families where there is a child with hemiplegia and adults with the condition, as well as a Useful Names and Addresses List to help you contact other organisations. [www.hemihelp.org.uk/hemiplegia/publications](http://www.hemihelp.org.uk/hemiplegia/publications)

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