



# Physical Impairment

**P**hysical impairments are difficulties in moving parts of the body. This can include difficulties with large movements such as walking, bending, reaching, sitting and standing, as well as smaller movements using the hands. Physical impairments can be related to a number of different health conditions, such as spinal injury, muscular dystrophy, club foot, traumatic brain injury, cerebral palsy or burns, amongst many others.

Many children with physical impairments do not have any difficulty learning and their only additional support needs are related to the movement of their body. Children with physical impairments may require assistance getting to and from school, going up and down steps or with smaller movements such as holding a pencil. Simple adaptations can be made, such as wrapping cloth around a spoon handle or a pencil to make gripping easier, building a rail or ramp to assist in going up steps, or using a wheelchair or crutches.

Community health workers, physiotherapists and families / caregivers are important in improving or maintaining movement, strength, coordination and function. This can prevent deformities, which increase difficulties in functioning. If a child requires physiotherapy or medical clinics due to their condition it is important that they attend these appointments regularly.

## Signs of physical impairments can include difficulties with:

- Coordination, strength and balance
- Walking, running, sitting upright, lifting and carrying
- Muscle stiffness (spasticity) or weakness (floppy).
- Fine movement skills, e.g., doing up buttons, grasping objects, using a pen or pencil
- Completing functional tasks, e.g., getting dressed, showering, eating independently
- Feeling or sensation, e.g., identifying hot from cold, being aware of touch
- Knowing the position of their body in space, e.g., being able to walk around objects, through doorways.

Families should provide a stimulating and supportive home environment, engaging the child in physical games and household responsibilities. Some ideas for improving physical function are: ball games, dancing, obstacle courses, or imitating the movement of different animals.

**"All schools shall promote fair and equitable access to education for all learners with disabilities regardless of their gender, age, social status, economic background, geographical location, race, ethnicity, religious background, sexual orientation and gender identity, or intersections between these factors."**

(MoE, Special and Inclusive Education Policy)

**"Every person has the right to early childhood education, primary and secondary education and further education."**

(Fiji Constitution)

**Who can help?** Your nearest health centre, the hospital in your division, your community health worker and physiotherapists. Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are available through the <https://www.frankhilton.org.fj/> and <https://www.facebook.com/spinalinjuryfiji/>

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Please note that this document is for informational/education purposes only and does not replace medical advice.



Ministry of Education

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