



## Mobility and Physical Disability

Many health issues or diagnoses have a profound impact on mobility (the ability to move from one location to another) and physical dexterity (the ability to perform physical tasks). In addition, these conditions typically impact overall physical health and stamina, thus affecting the person's ability to participate fully in activities of church life.

Some causes of mobility impairments are described below.

*Arthritis* is a complex family of musculoskeletal disorders. Though it is commonly thought of as a disease of the elderly, two-thirds of people with arthritis are under the age of 65. Arthritis can impact a person's ability to participate physically in church activities. At times, pain management regimens and their side effects may impact an individual's ability to participate fully in vital activities of church life.

*Polio* is the result of a viral infection that attacks spinal cord nerve cells. Internationally, polio is one of the most common causes of childhood disability. It can result in paralysis, loss of upper body muscle tone, breathing difficulties, and other muscular issues.

*Stroke*, a cardiovascular event, is caused when blood flow to the brain is interrupted. A stroke may cause a wide range of issues, including speech difficulties, paralysis, and other complications related to the affected parts of the brain.

*Traumatic brain injury* is the result of injury or trauma to the brain. Depending on the area of brain injury, multiple problems may result, including the loss of physical skills necessary for mobility.

*Amputation* is the result of the loss of a limb or part of a limb. Limb loss is typically a result of another health issue or trauma.

*Muscular dystrophy*, *multiple sclerosis*, and other neuromuscular diseases also impact mobility. Muscular dystrophy typically causes significant loss of mobility, while the impact of multiple sclerosis varies according to the individual.

*Cerebral palsy* often occurs as a result of trauma near or during birth or the first few years of life. It is a disorder that impairs control of movement and motor function.

*Spinal cord injury* is the result of damage directly to the spine. The damage can be the result of an injury or inflammation of the spinal cord.

*Dwarfism* can impact an individual's motor access in many aspects of daily life.

This is only a partial list of the types of issues that may impact mobility. Many more circumstances can cause a person to face mobility challenges. It is important to remember that many of these conditions do not impact intellectual functioning at all. In some cases, the motor challenges may occur concurrently with other developmental or functional difficulties. A common and mistaken assumption is that intellectual impairment always accompanies motor challenges. It is critical to remember that each person is unique; the presence of a physical challenge does not necessarily mean that an intellectual challenge is present as well.

Individuals with mobility challenges will have unique reactions to their challenges. Some people may have years of experience in developing strategies to cope with their mobility challenges. These individuals are often very independent and proud of the challenges they have overcome. In other cases, the mobility issues may be more recently acquired, and the individual may still be learning how to cope with limited physical movement.

The degree of impact of a mobility disability can vary from day to day, thus the person's needs for support or assistance can change over time, even daily. Some individuals with mobility challenges will prefer to take care of their own needs, while others may accept the assistance of church members. Offering help and asking what specific type of assistance is needed (before it is offered) is appropriate. Forcing assistance on the individual will rarely result in a positive outcome. As with other challenges, building a relationship based on trust, Christian care, and respect will often lead to a positive response to offers of assistance.

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