

Healthy Athletes Programs

Healthy Athletes is a Special Olympics program that provides free health screenings in a fun, welcoming environment that removes the anxiety and trepidation people with intellectual disabilities often experience when faced with a visit to a doctor or dentist. Our impact on the health and well-being of Special Olympics athletes around the world is great, in some cases saving lives by discovering unknown health issues or providing health care that otherwise would not be available.

Fit Feet (podiatry) Developed in collaboration with the American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine to evaluate and screen foot and ankle deformities of athletes and to provide education in proper footwear and care of the feet and toes.

FUNfitness (physical therapy) Originally developed by the American Physical Therapy Association, FUNfitness provides fitness screening and education services. Athlete flexibility, functional strength, balance and aerobic condition are assessed and physical therapy professionals advise on components of good fitness programs for risk prevention and make recommendations for optimal function in sports training and competition.

Opening Eyes (vision) A global partnership between Special Olympics and Lions Club International, an organization dedicated to global blindness prevention for more than 80 years, brings vision screenings to athletes worldwide. At Opening Eyes events, Special Olympics athletes receive extensive vision and eye health tests; refraction for those requiring further screening; prescription eyeglasses, if needed; prescription protective sports eyewear, if appropriate; and referral for follow-up care.

Health Promotion (nutrition, bone health, smoking cessation and sun safety) Health Promotion focuses on education athletes about healthy lifestyles and the facilitation of healthy choices. Because people with intellectual disabilities frequently have medical conditions such as heart disease, obesity and diabetes, and they tend to develop these conditions at earlier stages of life, Health Promotion mainly focuses on nutrition and exercise, as well as bone health, smoking cessation and sun safety using interactive educational activities and motivational information to encourage behavior change.

Special Smiles (dental) Special Smiles offers dental screenings, health education and prevention services, and refers athletes to potential sources of treatment and follow-up care. At a Special Smiles event, dental professionals provide oral screenings; oral health education and personal prevention products; and individually fitted sports mouth guards, if needed.

Healthy Hearing (audiology) Certified audiologists supervise Healthy Hearing screenings, which provide external ear canal inspection, evoked otoacoustic emissions screening, tympanometry and pure tone screening for those with identified need. Healthy Hearing assess athlete hearing and reports to coaches and caregivers if follow-up care is needed. Referrals may include earwax removal, further testing of middle ear problems or management of hearing loss. Individual molded ear plugs and referrals for hearing aids are also offered at many Healthy Hearing screening events.

