

Activity Trackers: A Guide for Coaches and Caregivers

Activity trackers (like Fitbits, Apple Watches, or wearable fitness devices) can be powerful tools for promoting healthy habits. This guide offers practical strategies for coaches and caregivers to support Special Olympics athletes in using activity trackers confidently and consistently – while promoting independence and personal goals.

WHY ACTIVITY TRACKERS CAN BE HELPFUL

When used consistently, activity trackers can:

- **Increase Motivation:** Seeing their steps and activity can motivate athletes to keep moving throughout the day.
- **Support Goal Setting:** Knowing their step count and activity levels helps athletes set realistic, meaningful goals based on their actual movement patterns.
- **Make Progress Visible:** Tracking daily activity helps athletes see improvement over time, which builds confidence and reinforces healthy habits.
- **Celebrate Achievements:** Many trackers provide badges, notifications, or visual rewards when athletes reach goals, offering immediate positive feedback.
- **Build Self-Awareness:** Athletes can learn when they're most active, what activities they enjoy most, and how their movement affects how they feel.

These benefits depend on consistent device use – which is why your support with set-up, charging, and daily wear is so important.

GETTING STARTED: DEVICE SET-UP

Setting up an activity tracker can be challenging. Here's how you can help your athletes!

Work Through Setup Together:

- **Set aside time** when you won't be rushed to work through the set-up process.
- **Follow the instructions** that came with your device step-by-step.
- **Let the athlete do as much as they can independently**, offering guidance when needed.
- If you and your athletes are having trouble, **search online for set-up videos specific to the device model**. Most manufacturers provide step-by-step video tutorials that can be easier to follow than written instructions.
- **Take photos or write down important steps** they might need to remember later.

The Special Olympics Fitness App

CONNECT THE ACTIVITY TRACKER TO THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS FITNESS APP

After setting up the device, help your athlete to download the Special Olympics Fitness App on their phone or tablet. Once installed, they can easily create a profile and connect their device to the app for seamless tracking.

Apple iPhone Users:

[Download the app from the Apple store.](#)

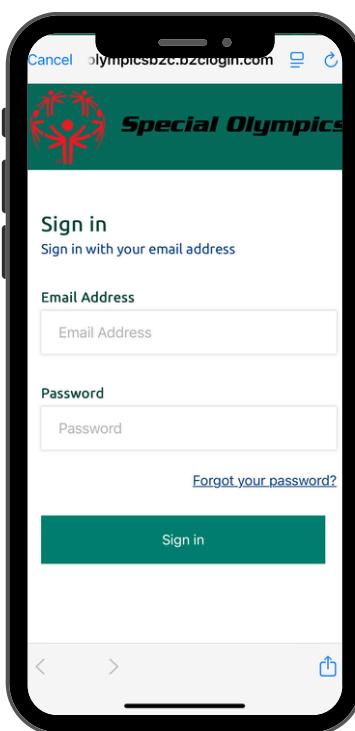


Android Users:

[Download the app from the Google Play store.](#)



Create an Account:

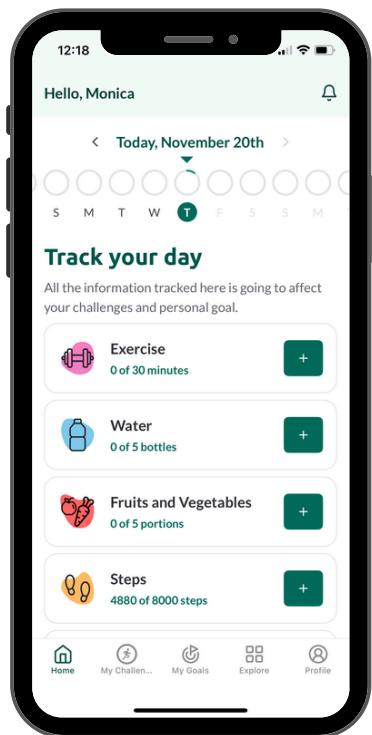


Open the SO Fitness App.

- **Log in or create an account if you don't have one yet.**

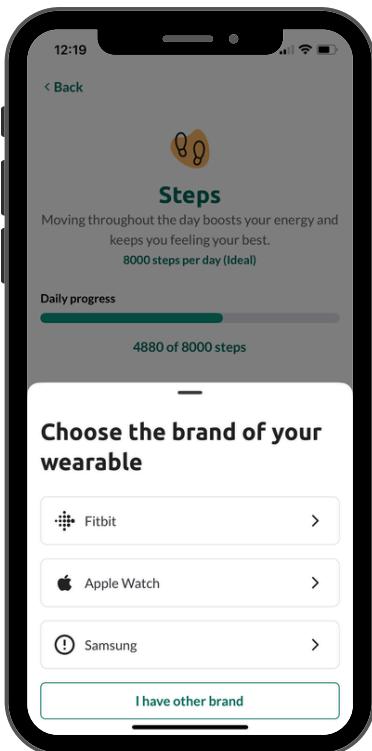
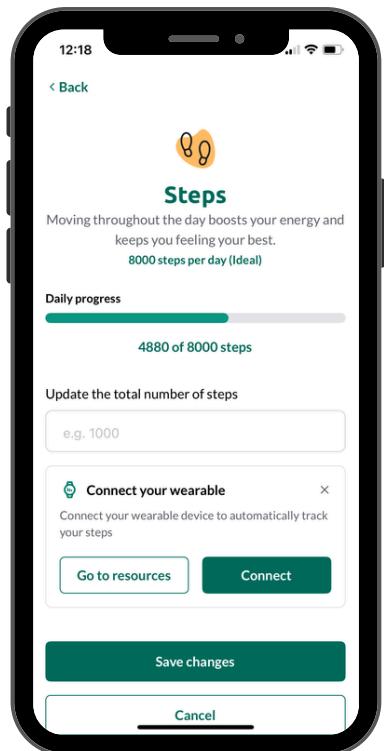
The Special Olympics Fitness App

Connect your Tracker:



Navigate to the "Home" screen

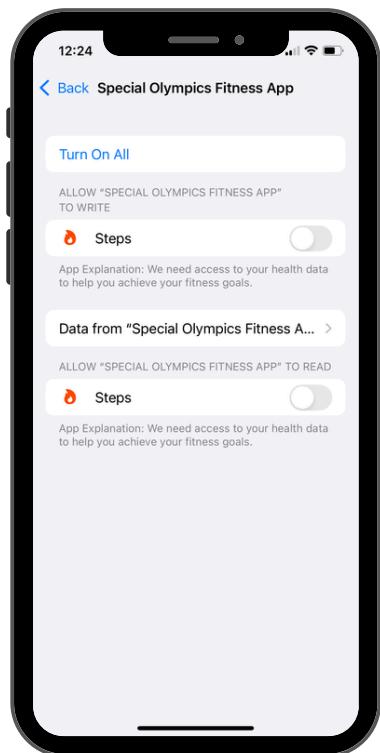
- Locate "Steps" and tap the plus sign (+) icon next to it



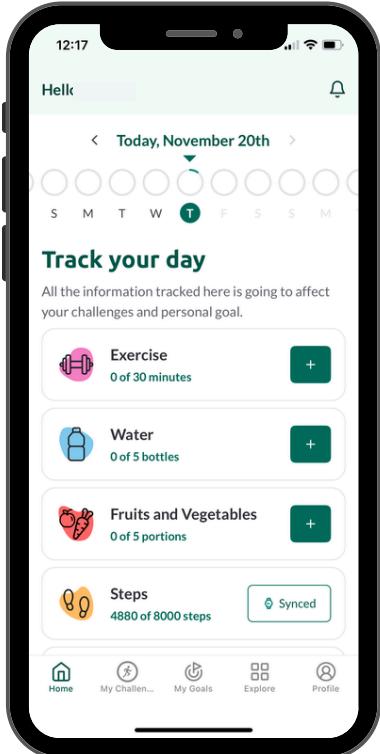
Select the athlete's device brand from the list (Fitbit, Apple Watch, Garmin, etc.)

The Special Olympics Fitness App

Connect your Tracker:



- **Follow prompts to authorize the connection** (this may redirect to the device manufacturer's app or website)
- **Grant necessary permissions when requested** (access to activity data, Bluetooth connection)



The device will now automatically sync to the app!

- Bookmark or save these instructions for future reference

Building Comfort with Wearing the Device

Many athletes need time to get used to wearing something on their wrist. Here's how to support this adjustment:

START SLOWLY IF NEEDED

- If athletes aren't used to wearing anything on their wrist, help them build up to it gradually.
- Try having them wear a bracelet or hair tie around their wrist for a few days first.
- Once they're comfortable with that sensation, introduce the device.
- Let them wear it for short periods at first, then gradually increase the time.

ADDRESS COMFORT ISSUES



This activity tracker is just right.

- Check that the band isn't too tight or too loose. You should be able to fit one finger between the band and their wrist.
- Many trackers have replaceable bands. Explore options like cloth bands, different sizes, or alternative materials if the original band is uncomfortable.
- Some people prefer wearing it on their dominant wrist, others on their non-dominant wrist. Let athletes choose what feels best.
- If their wrist gets red, itchy, or sore, have them take a break and consider trying a different band style.

ENCOURAGE DAILY USE

Wearing the device daily takes time and encouragement. Try these strategies:



Integrate Use into Existing Routines

- Support athletes in choosing when and how they wear their tracker each day. This could be part of a morning routine or whenever they're most active.
- Keep the device in a consistent, visible spot so it's easy to remember.
- Pair putting on the device with another daily habit like brushing teeth or after a shower.



Create Helpful Reminders

- Ask what kind of reminders would help them to wear their device (visual checklist, phone alarm, verbal reminder from you).
- Gradually reduce reminders as the habit becomes stronger.



Make Progress Visible and Meaningful

- Explore the SO Fitness App together and talk about what's interesting to them (heart rate, step count, distance walked, etc.).
- Use calendars, visuals, or step logs if they enjoy tracking progress over time.



Use Positive Encouragement

- Recognize effort and interest:
 - *It looks like you've been really consistent this week – nice work!*
 - *You've been wearing your tracker every day – do you feel a difference?*
- Keep the focus on their goals, preferences, and feedback.
- Celebrate consistency, not just high numbers.

Consistent Charging

A dead battery is one of the biggest barriers to consistent use. Help your athlete prevent that with the following strategies.

CREATE A CHARGING ROUTING THAT WORKS

- Help identify a charging time that fits their routine, like during quiet time or overnight.
- Choose a specific, visible spot for the charger (e.g., bedside table, kitchen counter, near other electronics).

PROMOTE INDEPENDENCE

- Support athletes in learning to charge the device independently – offer guidance, but step back as they gain confidence.
- If a magnetic charger is easier to use, consider switching.
- Visual or written checklists can help reinforce the habit if helpful.
- Be supportive of athletes' preferences: if they prefer reminders or setting phone alarms, work together to choose what works best.

TROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER

- If there's an issue with charging, try different solutions together! Check the charging cord, make sure the device is securely connected, or try a different outlet.
- Keep a backup charging cable if possible.

ADDRESS BARRIERS COLLABORATIVELY

- If athletes need support with getting the watch on and off when it's time to charge, ask if they would like assistance.
- If athletes aren't charging it regularly, ask what's working and what isn't – together, come up with a solution that feels right for them.



Motivate Movement

Activity trackers are most valuable when their data drives movement and healthy habits. Try these four motivation strategies – each paired with a communication tip!

CONNECT ACTIVITY TO THEIR INTERESTS

- Link steps and movement to what they enjoy! Try the '[That Activity Suits You](#)' Homeplay lesson from the Fitness through Sport Playbook to help identify activities that match their personality and preferences.
- Focus on enjoyment first, and the steps will follow.



Offer Choices

- Let them choose how they want to be active, when they want to wear their tracker, or how they review their data.
- Use this as an opportunity to build self-determination and decision-making skills.

CREATE SHARED GOALS

- Invite them to set realistic and meaningful activity goals. For some, it may be reaching a step target; for others, it's walking a certain route or dancing for 10 minutes.
- Family or partner challenges can add motivation if they enjoy social engagement.



Use Clear, Supportive Language

- Frame conversations around shared goals and choices:
 - *"What would you like to track today?"*
 - *"Do you want to check your steps after lunch?"*

CELEBRATE PROGRESS

- Help them track milestones in a way that makes sense to them – step logs, sticker charts, or verbal recognition.
- Ask how they like to celebrate progress. Some may enjoy a reward, while others simply want acknowledgement.



Be Curious

- Ask open-ended questions like:
 - *"What are you most proud of this week?"* and *"How did your walk feel today?"*
- Listen to their feedback about what's working and what isn't.
- Adjust your support based on what they tell you.

BE FLEXIBLE

- Some days will be more active than others, and that's okay. Support a long-term mindset focused on building healthy habits, not perfect performance.
- Be supportive when someone needs a break or wants to try something different.



Support Understanding

- If helpful, use visuals, plain-language instructions, or demonstrations. Ask questions like:
 - *"Would it help to see a picture of this?"* and *"Do you want me to walk through it with you?"*
- Don't assume what they need – let them guide you