

Esther Overton

- what's your excuse for inactivity?



Women's lives are busier than ever. Work, family responsibilities, housework, study and friendships all vie for precious minutes throughout the day. But if you think all that adds up to a good reason to avoid physical activity, think again. Esther Overton is proof that there are very few reasons not to lead an active life.

Esther was born in 1990 with a condition called arthrogryposis multiplex congenita, which means all her joints from the neck down are fixed and her bones break easily. Although she is confined to an electric wheelchair, she does not let that hold her back in life. In fact, physical activity is one of her main priorities - she is currently training for a spot in the 2012 Paralympic Games swimming team. Her weekly training includes four swim sessions and six Pilates sessions, which she schedules around her study towards a double degree in commerce and accounting and corporate finance at Adelaide University. Esther has not used her disability or her busy schedule as an excuse to give up on pursuing her goals.



Esther began swimming at about six months of age as a form of physiotherapy. She took to the pool like, you guessed it, a duck to water. "I love it," said Esther, who lives with her family in Enfield, South Australia. "Competitive swimming has taught me many important skills - time management, discipline, focus, determination and resilience."

If she makes the 2012 team, it will be her second consecutive Paralympic Games. In 2008 in Beijing, she placed fifth in the 50m backstroke and sixth in the 50m freestyle. Just seven weeks prior to the Beijing Games, Esther's lung collapsed. Then at the staging camp, she broke her arm, presenting nearly impossible odds to perform well. Many people would have given up on their dreams, but not Esther; she is a fighter and always has been. "If you are willing to put in the work, you can achieve anything you set your mind to," she said.

While training in Victoria in 2008, Esther had the opportunity to talk to a number of school-aged children about the importance of being active and healthy eating. She encouraged them to get involved in sport because it is

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a great way to keep fit and healthy and grow as a person. As technology has become so appealing and prevalent in our lives - especially in the lives of children - Esther believes it is more important than ever to get off the couch or away from computers and video games and do something active.

Esther started swimming to improve her health, but as she ages, swimming is less of a tonic and sometimes even leads to increased discomfort. Nevertheless, she continues to train in and out of the pool simply because it brings her joy. Exercise benefits such as weight management, heart health, opportunities for socialisation and travel, the satisfaction of achieving goals and freedom from her chair provide additional motivation and enjoyment.

After 2012, Esther will retire from competitive swimming, but not from her active lifestyle; after all, she has no excuses. Do you?

