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Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)

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Around 40% of SCIs are due to car accidents but can also be caused by a fall, sports injury, work injury, or gunshot wound.^{1,2} Non-traumatic SCIs may involve pathologies such as an infectious disease, tumor, spinal stenosis, surgery complications¹, musculoskeletal diseases such as osteoarthritis, or a congenital issue like spina bifida.³

In the US 17,500 individuals annually have a SCI, and there are over 36 million individuals living with this condition.¹

Symptoms include loss of voluntary muscle movement and loss of sensation and motor control below the level of injury.

Rehabilitation

You will likely be in the hospital for some period until your condition is stable to move to Inpatient Rehab. OTs will be working with you to learn to do what you need to do before you can go home. Your level of SCI will affect what functions and abilities you have, and what you will need to adapt to.

Within the first three months and up to a year (depending on the injury) is generally when medically we can see what sensation and motor function will be available in your body.¹

Additional Resources:

Adjusting to Life after SCI

https://mskctcSC.org/sci/factsheets/adjusting_to_life

Sexuality & Sexual Functioning After SCI

<https://mskctc.org/sci/factsheets/sexuality>

Job Accommodation Network

<https://askjan.org/>

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Learning to live with a Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)

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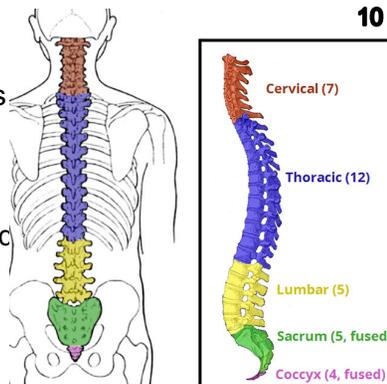


Adjusting to life with a SCI is a very difficult transition. It has likely changed how you do things for yourself and this has a big impact emotionally, physically and socially. While every individual and injury is unique there are some common areas to consider in how it will affect you or your loved ones.

Occupational Therapists (OTs) are here to work with you to help you get back to these activities of daily living and anything that is important to you. The initial period is the hardest, but with time you will find the rhythms and routines that work best for you so that you can do what is meaningful to you.

Your OT's contact information:

If your SCI is in the cervical region it is likely that your abilities might include muscles of your eyes and face, turning your head side to side, and possibly shrugging your shoulders.



Any little bit is a lot and your OT will work with you to make the most of it.

If your injury is in the thoracic area you may have more use of your arms and hands, again depending on the level and whether it is complete or incomplete. Injuries at the lumbar and pelvic areas likely will still affect the ability of your legs to walk, but you may have more trunk stability. At any level, you may experience involuntary movements, or spasticity in the areas below your injury.

Understanding the specific level of your injury with your medical professionals will guide setting up new routines for bowel and bladder care. You may be trained in intermittent use of a catheter, or have an indwelling catheter.⁷ You will need to know how to prevent infections and how to prevent the condition of **Autonomic Dysreflexia**, the body's response to an unwelcome stimulus. Being aware of symptoms including headache, increased sweating, and a spike in heart rate or blood pressure, is crucial as the condition is life threatening⁸ and must be addressed quickly, if it cannot be resolved it is important to seek medical intervention.

Home Exercise Program

Using anaerobic methods to build strength and muscle mass, your OT will be there to guide you to an individualized program to physical fitness and upper body strength. Being aware of your blood pressure when you move, and shifting your body weight so that you don't develop pressure sores is very important⁵ as is avoiding repetitive stress injuries of your upper extremities.

Transfer techniques

To gain independence and confidence in transferring your body between bed, wheelchair, toilets, showers, chairs, cars, te floor, exercise equipment, or whatever you need to do, your OT and PT will work with you to provide you individualized instruction and practice.

Driver Training and Carfit Assessment

Depending on your level of injury you may be able to drive, but it will involve training to use hand controls and it is important to be sure that the proper adaptive equipment and wheelchair storage is in place.

Home based intervention

OTs can help you to assess safety risks for occupations such as cooking and work with you to adapt how you use your kitchen and can teach practices to avoid injuries such as burns- being aware that you won't feel such an injury.

Supporting your mental health

OTs can help you to identify your goals, work through challenges, and help to connect you to support. Getting back to work or finding a new career can be psychologically and socially important⁶.

At any level you will be able to participate in the things you do to care for yourself everyday, but you may need some **assistive technology** to accomplish this. This may include anything that you are able to manipulate with your muscles to do what you need to do.

Likely this will also include a mobility device such as a wheelchair. There is a wide variety of wheelchairs that can be fit to you and your needs. Your OT may use the **Functional Mobility & Wheelchair Assessment (FMWA)**³ to help you to identify what will work best for you.

The **Spinal Cord Independence Measure (SCIM)**⁴ is another tool your OT may use to identify what is most important to you to set goals for your therapy sessions.

Other assistive technologies include modified kitchen equipment, attachments for your wheelchair to support regular movement. Your OT can work with you based on your individual needs.

