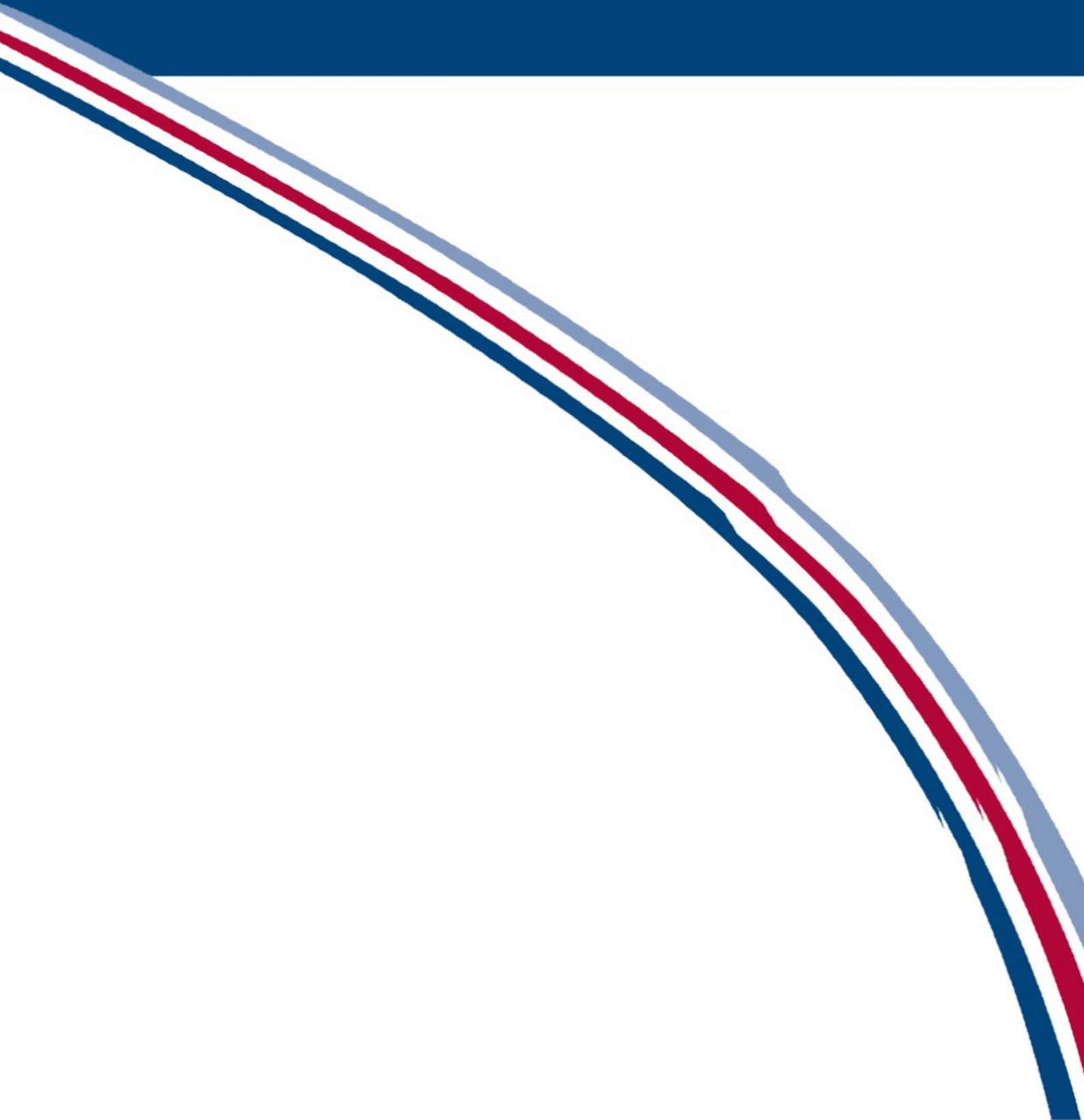


Steps to Ageing Well

Step 4: Care of the Bowels



WHAT IS SIA?

SIA is the national charity for people with spinal cord injuries and their families. If you, a relative or friend is paraplegic or tetraplegic, or you are interested in our work, why not join us? Membership is free of charge and all new UK members will receive a year's free subscription to SIA's bi-monthly magazine *Forward*. An annual subscription to *Forward* is £20.00.

We also circulate a monthly email newsletter, 'e-clips' to all who subscribe while our popular interactive website offers a Message Board as well as hundreds of pages of useful information.

We produce a wide range of publications (available to purchase) which deal with all aspects of living with spinal cord injury, e.g. books on bowel and bladder management, sexuality, publications for health care professionals, as well as sports opportunities. We also have an extensive series of Factsheets on a wide range of topics, and, for those pursuing a compensation claim; we publish a Directory of Personal Injury Solicitors.

Our Freephone Advice Line is accessible by e-mail, fax, post and telephone and provides accurate and up-to-date information on subjects including welfare advice, specialist equipment, legal rights etc as well as health related topics. We run a Vocational Support service for those wishing to return to employment, retrain or take up volunteering. Our Health and Ageing projects both work to improve the quality of life of spinal cord injured people and can be accessed via the Advice Line. Externally, our Outreach Service, staffed by spinal cord injured people, operates at all ten Spinal Injuries Centres in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as out in the community, on a regional basis.

SIA also actively campaigns on vital issues affecting the everyday lives of disabled people, as set out in our campaigns manifesto. We are represented on major voluntary and statutory bodies and our own Governing Board is composed of spinal cord injured people. We have our own state-of-the-art premises, SIA House, which combines the twin principles of inclusive design and accessibility and from here we run the only specialist spinal cord injury Library in the country.

To find out more, or join us, please write to us at:

Spinal Injuries Association, SIA House, 2 Trueman Place, Oldbrook, Milton Keynes MK6 2HH or contact us on:

Tel: 0845 678 6633 (General Office – 9-5)
0800 980 0501 (Freephone Advice Line (9.30-1pm&2pm– 4.30pm))
Fax 0845 070 69211
Website: www.spinal.co.uk
E-mail: sia@spinal.co.uk

SIA Registered Charity Number: 1054097



Slater and Gordon Lawyers are one of the country's leading claimant personal injury law firms, recovering millions of pounds worth of compensation for accident victims every year. We are experts in securing the maximum amount of spinal cord injury compensation and getting rehabilitation support as quickly as possible.

Slater and Gordon Lawyers understand the sudden change in lifestyle caused by an injury to the spinal cord and the immediate strain this places on finances. That is why with Slater and Gordon Lawyers on your side, a No Win, No Fee (Conditional Fee) agreement can enable you to get the support and financial compensation you need to live with a spinal cord injury, not only in the short term, but also to provide for your future needs.

Every spinal cord injury claim is different and the amount of compensation paid will vary from case to case. We will however give you an accurate indication at the earliest stage as to how much compensation you could expect to receive, to help you plan for your future.

Slater and Gordon Lawyers have a specialist team dedicated to pursuing compensation claims on behalf of those who sustain spinal cord injury in all types of accident, be it a road traffic collision, an accident in the workplace or whilst on holiday or travelling in a foreign country. Our expert solicitors provide total support for our clients, particularly at times when they may feel at their most vulnerable. We approach each case with understanding and sensitivity.

Where possible, we will seek to secure an interim payment of compensation to relieve financial pressures and cover immediate expenses. We can also provide advice on long-term financial planning and rehabilitation.

Contact Slater and Gordon Lawyers for a free consultation. We will be happy to help you. Freephone [0808 175 8105](tel:08081758105) or visit our website at www.slaterandgordon.co.uk

Slater and Gordon Lawyers are proud to be a Diamond Corporate Sponsor of the Spinal Injuries Association and a wider supporter of their services. By supporting the SIA, we understand the need to raise money which will go towards funding SIA's key services such as their Advice Line, website and peer support in the spinal injury centres, hospitals and wider community.

Ageing Well with a Spinal Cord Injury

Introduction

The information contained in the Steps to Ageing Well Series is designed to help spinal cord injured (SCI) people consider the possible effects of ageing; tips on how to prevent those effects; and suggestions on managing the problems as they arise.

In addition to the information and helpful hints, comments have been offered by SIA members who have lived many years with SCI.

There are numerous definitions of ageing, here is an example:

Physiological ageing may be defined as “the gradual, natural deterioration and decay of cells and their replacement over time” and old age as “the point at which cell deterioration, damage and death outstrips the body’s capacity for recovery, repair and growth”.

One of the issues faced is the increased need for assistance with daily activities. Fatigue and weakness are reasons people ask for additional help especially with such areas as transferring, toileting and dressing.

In parallel, partners/carers may well be experiencing the effects of ageing themselves and therefore may not be able to offer the same level of assistance as previously.

Ageing can start earlier in SCI people and the length of time since injury is a major contributing factor. There are many ways to approach the inevitable effects of ageing with some schools of thought even suggesting one should “attribute nothing to age”. But by being realistic and prepared, the journey can be a comfortable one. A high percentage (64%) of SCI people rate their quality of life as good right up to the latter stage of their lives.



Ageing Well – Your Bowels



Bowel management represents one of the most important aspects of living with a spinal cord injury (SCI). When things go wrong with bowel management, it can dominate your thoughts and impact your social and work life.

Bowel Function

The process of defaecation (passing a poo) involves several organs. Partially digested food passes from the small intestines into the large intestine (colon) where water is reabsorbed and the waste product becomes more solid and forms a stool. Action of the gut wall passes the stool along until it reaches the rectum where signals tell you that you need to open your bowels. Following SCI this signal is lost.

Bowel Problems Associated with Ageing

In the Ageing Well Survey (2007) 46.6% of respondents reported that over the last 10 years, they had experienced increasing difficulties with bowel management.

➤ **Bowel accidents** (called faecal incontinence) can be caused by:

- Not emptying bowels properly.
- Illness e.g. a cold or urinary tract infection.
- Diarrhoea caused by:
 - Change in routine
 - Over indulgence in food and / or alcohol
 - Certain medications e.g. antibiotics, very strong laxatives.
 - Illness e.g. food poisoning.
 - Stress / anxiety.

➤ **Haemorrhoids (Piles)** - you can be assessed at your annual check up or through your GP.

➤ Bowel Cancer

Older people are at higher risk of bowel cancer. The NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme offers screening every two years to all men and women aged 60 to 69. People over 70 can request a screening kit. <http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel/index.html#who-eligible>
Find out about symptoms and diagnosis of bowel cancer at: www.bowelcancer.tv

➤ Constipation

Causes of Constipation:

- Bowels can become 'sluggish' with age, slowing the passage of food through the gut.
- Long term medication such as codeine based painkillers
- Not enough fibre
- Not drinking enough water
- Missing meals especially breakfast
- Change of routine – e.g. when on holiday; going into hospital

Bowel Care

The SIA Bowel Management fact sheet describes in detail the methods of bowel care ranging from digital manual evacuation through to the anal irrigation system. Download from www.spinal.co.uk



Top Tips

- Keeping a daily bowel diary if problems occur will help you and your doctor to understand what is happening and what action to take.
- You may not be as agile as you once were so care needs to be taken when transferring onto the toilet. Also, bending forward to insert suppositories may make you at risk of falling. It could be time to rethink equipment needs such as hoists, or performing bowel care on the bed.
- Some people may find their bowel routine takes longer due to changes in dexterity. It may be time to consider getting professional help or making changes to your bowel routine.
- There are assistive techniques (what are they?) you may wish to try in addition to your normal bowel management if you find over time your bowel has 'slowed down'.

➤ If you feel your current bowel management routine is not meeting your needs, you **can** consider alternatives such as:

- **Anal irrigation system** – this procedure works by introducing warm tap water into the rectum using a catheter. The lower bowel is 'flushed out' as is the result. It is performed whilst sitting on the toilet. For details of how to obtain and use this system phone: **0800 132787**.

- **Colostomy**

A colostomy is a surgical procedure in which your colon is cut and brought to the outside through the abdominal wall to create an artificial opening or "stoma". Your faeces can then be collected in a bag called a colostomy bag that is attached to the opening. In most cases, with SCI, a colostomy would be a permanent measure. A colostomy may be your preferred method of bowel management or may be needed in the case of a disease of the bowel e.g. bowel cancer.

Some people consider this option. The main advantages are the time saved and maintaining independence. On the down side, people may feel self conscious, so finding the right products and support is essential. Most Primary Care Trusts now employ Stoma Care Nurses who can offer advice and support. The colostomy association can be contacted at <http://www.colostomyassociation.org.uk/>

- **When changing your bowel management it can take up to several weeks to establish**

effectively. Give yourself time to adjust to your new regime.

You can get advice about major changes to your bowel management routine and support from:

- Your Spinal Cord Injury Centre
- Continence Specialist Nurse employed at your local Primary Care Trust.
- Bladder and Bowel Foundation –
Tel: 01536533255;
<http://www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org/>