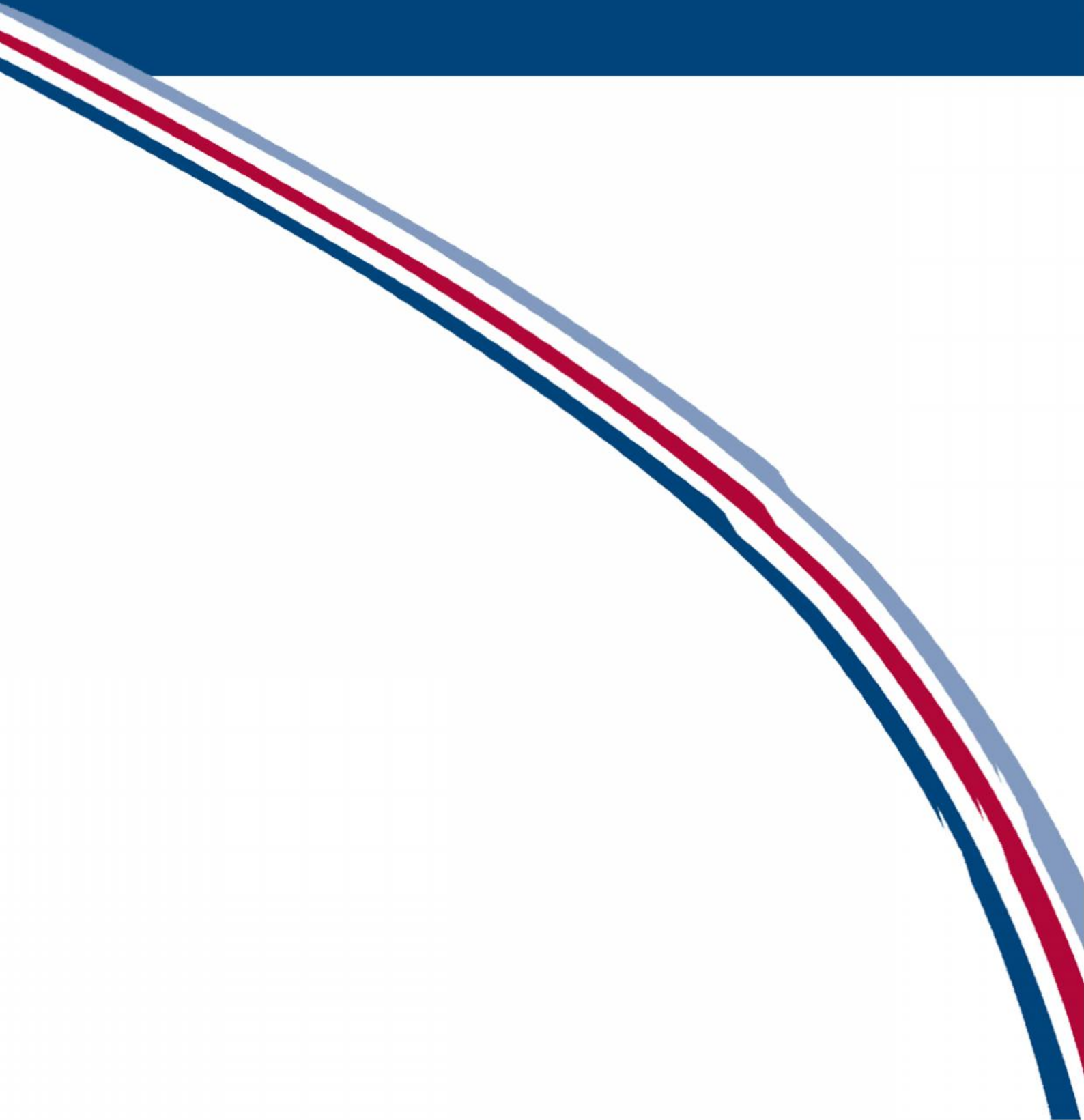


Steps to Ageing Well

Step 6: Physical Activity



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 - Physical Activity

The benefits of physical activity to health and well-being are well-documented. They can be enormous, maximising your abilities both physically and mentally.

However, physical activity encompasses a wide range of activities, not necessarily all of the intensive, sporting kind. Simple, but regular, gentle exercise incorporated into your daily routine can reap benefits and help keep you supple and your mind active. Exercise also has social benefits too if you join a club or group of like-minded people to follow your chosen activity.

General Benefits of Physical Activity

Health Benefits

- ✓ improves and boosts the immune system
- ✓ aids good circulation and maintains good skin tone
- ✓ helps take nutrients and oxygen via the blood to all the vital organs
- ✓ helps to reduce high blood pressure and the risk of cardiovascular disease
- ✓ aids in weight control, along with eating healthy food.
- ✓ increases energy levels
- ✓ helps keep bones strong
- ✓ improves quality of sleep

Social Benefits

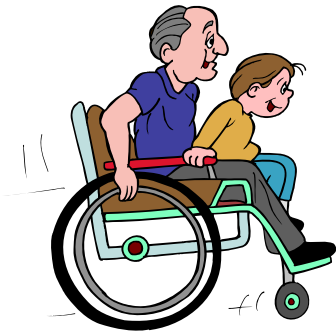
- ✓ widens your social circle through meeting up with others with shared interests
- ✓ broadens your mind to exploring new opportunities

Psychological Benefits

- ✓ improves self esteem
- ✓ reduces feelings of stress
- ✓ helps maintain a positive outlook

It may be a long time since you were discharged from hospital having completed your rehabilitation. Exercise probably formed some part in preparing you for the future. If you have not exercised since, it's never too late to start! On the other hand, if you have taken part in fairly strenuous sports or activities since you were injured, you may now be considering a more gentle form of exercise. Doing so will help to conserve your shoulder and other vulnerable joints.

In the SIA Ageing Well Survey 2007, respondents cited physical fitness as their fifth most important concern after weight control issues.



Being well prepared and able to adjust to the effects of ageing with a SCI will help dispel the fears surrounding ageing and generally lead to a better quality of life. Keeping fit is just one of many ways that can help to reduce the effects of ageing.

Benefits Specific to those with SCI

- ✓ aids muscle strength – important for propelling and transferring
- ✓ increases flexibility – helpful when reaching for objects
- ✓ decreases spasms – some SCI people find that spasms, pain, stiffness and contractures are all decreased/avoided through regular exercise
- ✓ improves posture and body shape – reducing the risk of falling
- ✓ improves circulation – helps avoid pressure sores
- ✓ increases aerobic endurance – which aids general stamina

In the Ageing Well Survey 2007, when respondents were asked about their exercise habits, 22% reported never being involved in active exercise with a further 10% engaging in active exercise less than once a week. With regard to passive exercise, 65% of respondents reported never engaging in passive exercise with a further 7% engaged in passive exercise less than once a week.

Here are just a few examples of activities which may be suitable for you:

1. Yoga and Tai Chi/Qigong (which means engaging both the mind and the body). These forms of exercise are good for stretching (but be careful not to overstretch as this could cause sprains to muscles and ligaments). Go along to a class with a friend where you can learn the techniques under expert tuition and supplement this with the use of DVDs at home.
2. **Resistance techniques and use of light weights** - using light weights home or in a gym can help build up and maintain strength. Once again you should have instruction from a fitness instructor first to ensure safety and get the best out of the techniques. Using weights usually involves repeating a series of movements a given number of times, known as repetitions. An advantage of using weights is that you can exercise specific muscles and muscle groups, so you can target, say, your upper arms where you may want to increase your muscle tone to help with

transfers etc. You can also use weights at home and, if you can't afford the weights themselves, you can always substitute bags of sugar, or tins of beans for the real thing.

3. **Swimming** - one of the best all-rounders for increasing flexibility and stamina and excellent for aerobic exercise.
4. **Bowls (Indoors or Outdoors)** – a great team sport, requires precision and good mental concentration. Bowls has a social element and, when played outdoors, offers the benefits of fresh air.
5. **Snooker/Pool** – another activity that has a strong social element and is also very competitive. Requires good concentration and a steady hand.
6. **Table Tennis** – you can either play at your own pace or train up to a high level. Good for increasing stamina and eye to hand co-ordination.
7. **Gym Workouts** – if you're solo, joining a gym is a great way to meet people. All gyms now have to include facilities for disabled people. Getting into a regular routine at the gym has many health benefits and if you plan a fitness programme with the gym staff that fits your needs and abilities, you'll soon notice an improvement in your physical and general health.
8. **Massage** – a weekly or monthly massage will help stimulate your circulation, improving lymph drainage. Also, most people report that a massage creates a wonderful 'feel good' factor.
9. **Exercise DVDs** – exercising in the privacy of your own home is ideal if you have difficulty getting out regularly, can't find a suitable venue or feel self-conscious about exercise in front of others. There's a huge range of exercise DVDs available, many of which are ideal for older people or those with restricted movements.
10. **Fencing**
Fencing has always been popular among spinal cord injured people with its national Body, the BDFa, having something for everyone – it can even provide a path to becoming a Paralympic champion! Alternatively, you could do a regular workout among friends or use it as a social base with the odd bit of exercise thrown in – in other words, it's as intense and ambitious as you want it to be. The BDFa can provide equipment for beginners, but once you've been bitten by the fencing bug you'll probably want to buy your own. The link to their website <http://www.bdfa.org.uk/>



11. Rambling – getting out into the country is a great way to feel the benefits of fresh air, sunshine and feeling at one with nature. The Disabled Ramblers Club has many routes which are accessible or you could try www.walkswithwheelchairs.com, which is a growing database of walks suitable for wheelchair users

12. **FES – Functional Electrical Stimulation**

FES Cycling is an effective way of keeping fit following SCI when regular exercise is difficult to get. This is a therapeutic activity that uses a transcutaneous (through unbroken skin) electrical current to initiate muscle contractions of paralysed lower limbs in person who have sustained a spinal cord injury”. To find out more about FES you can visit their website at:

<http://fescycling.com/> or telephone for details Anatomical Concepts (UK) 0141 952 2323.

<http://www.salisburyfes.com/>

13. **Standing**

Standing has significant benefits for SCI people, both physical and psychological. A regular programme of standing in a suitable standing frame can:

- help reduce spasticity and prevent contractures in the hips and knees
- help keep bones strong (you must weight bear to gain this benefit)
- help reduce pressure sores through change of position
- help keep bladder and bowel function problems to a minimum
- help lung function and circulation
- help to improve self-esteem.

These are just a few of the activities you can try. Others include wheelchair cricket, tennis, archery and many more. You'll find a huge age range involved, so even if you're the 'wrong side' of 50 and haven't exercised for a while, don't let

this put you off. There's many more like you and sports and exercise clubs and classes are well-known for their warm welcomes.

Before you start:

If you haven't exercised for a while, be sure that you start gently and always warm up your muscles before beginning any activity. Here's some top tips to make sure you exercise safely:

Top Tips

Pain – this is a sign that something is wrong, don't ignore it. STOP! You may have overdone things, so take a few days' break before you resume the activity and only continue if you're pain free.

Autonomic dysreflexia (AD) – if you are injured above T6 there is the risk that you may experience Autonomic Dysreflexia as your pulse rises. Your body may also have problems regulating sweating and temperature control. If you're prone to AD, speak to your doctor before taking on any form of strenuous exercise.

Always **warm up** before exercise and warm down with some gentle exercise and stretching for about 5 minutes afterwards.

Try to '**mix it up**' to maintain your interest. Unless you decide to become a Paralympian (!), don't do the same exercises or activity for months at a time but make up a varied and interesting programme for yourself.

Drink sufficient water during exercise to stay hydrated and cool.

Be aware of the dangers of exercising outside in hot weather. If you are outside wear appropriate clothing (loose, cotton clothing is best).

Never exercise if you are ill – e.g. bladder or chest infections.

Before embarking on an exercise regime consult your GP or spinal consultant. You could also engage the help of a physiotherapist, personal trainer or SCI professional to get you started, that way you'll know that you're exercising in the safest and most effective way.

Try and find an 'exercise buddy' as this will help keep you motivated.

Be realistic with your goals. If you haven't exercised for a while, start off slowly and gradually build up as you get stronger and fitter.

But, most of all, ENJOY!

Useful Information:

Books & Factsheets:

Moving Forward, Book 14 – Leisure Activities, Holidays and Travel
Available from SIA Publications, Price £6

Useful Organisations / Websites:

Ableize – website giving information about groups and clubs in the UK, listed by counties.

<http://www.ableize.com/recreation-sports/>

Bowls

British Wheelchair Bowls Association
Ian Blackmore, Chairman
'Kerria', Station Road
East Preston
West Sussex BN16 3AJ

Tel: 07932 791519

Email : ianblackmore@bwba.org.uk

<http://www.bwba.org.uk/>

Cricket

British Association of Cricketers with Disabilities

<http://www.bacd.co.uk/>

Cricket Federation for People with Disabilities

Dick Wildgoose
Wisholme
St. Martins Road
Gobowen, Oswestry
Shropshire SY11 3PL

Tel: 01691 650554

<http://www.cfpd.org.uk/site/>

Tai Chi

UK Tai Chi
Park View
Potterton Park
Potterton, Barwick-in-Elmet
Leeds LS15 4NN

Tel: 0113 393 5005

www.uktaichi.com

This factsheet has been prepared by SIA and contains general advice only which we hope will be of use to you. Nothing in this factsheet should be construed as the giving of specific advice and it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action. SIA does not accept any liability arising from its use. We aim to ensure the information is as up to date and accurate as possible, but please be warned that certain areas are subject to change from time to time. Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, companies, products, services or publications in this factsheet does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by SIA.

Published Jan 2012 JS