

Steps to Ageing Well

Step 1: Care of Shoulder Joints



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 bi-monthly email newsletter, 'e-clips' to all who subscribe while our popular interactive website offers Chat Rooms and 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.



...because life needn't stop when you're paralysed.

SHOULDER JOINTS

The shoulder joint is often referred to as a spheroidal joint. It is capable of a large range of movement, including rotation which encompasses many of our daily activities.

The shoulder joint was never designed to carry the burden of daily transfers and the forward propelling of a manual wheelchair, let alone highly competitive wheelchair sports. These activities, carried out over many years, cause extra wear and tear on the joint.

With advancing years, length of time since SCI and reduction in overall muscle strength, degeneration of the shoulder joints can reduce the ability to transfer and eventually compromise independence.

Other conditions which can affect the shoulders in SCI are; osteoarthritis, tendonitis, dislocations and rotator cuff tears.

The SIA Ageing Well Survey reported that over the past 10 years, over half of respondents had increasing difficulties with shoulder or wrist movements.

Here are some tips which can help reduce strain on shoulders and plan for the future

- You can lessen the strain on your shoulders by keeping your weight at an acceptable level
- Use 'weight shifts' (forward and sideways movements) in your wheelchair to relieve pressure, instead of lifting every time
- Don't carry unnecessary baggage on your wheelchair

- Position the wheels of your wheelchair correctly, to be in line with your shoulders
- Maintain your wheelchair – with special attention to correct tyre pressure
- Ensure you use the correct pushing technique; if you are not sure, consult with the Occupational Therapist (OT) at your next check-up, and get advice on the correct position in the wheelchair for you.
- Examine what methods of transfer you have been using and think how you could adapt these – perhaps assessment and advice from an OT would help
- Try aids for transferring – such as sliding boards, hoists and swivel seats. These may also assist your carer.
- Wear a good quality glove to protect skin and help prevent carpal tunnel syndrome (by absorbing some of the pressure and providing extra support).
- Explore add-on power pack for wheelchair propulsion.
- Consider changing from a strenuous sport e.g. wheelchair basket ball to a gentler one – e.g. swimming or bowls
- Use a lightweight wheelchair
- Use a power chair part-time (e.g. power chair at work, manual for social life)
- Replace vehicle seat with a mechanical or electronic wheelchair system
- Change your motor vehicle for a model that could accommodate a lift.
- For tetraplegics, support shoulders when in bed as well as in the wheelchair.

CRUCIALLY – MAKE CHANGES BEFORE DAMAGE OCCURS.

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If you have painful shoulders

- Rest the shoulders during acute periods of pain
- Discuss pain management solutions which may be available to you for prevention, management and treatment of pain. Ask for your pain level to be rated by your GP. Pain is now considered the 5th vital sign and should be routinely measured by considering the intensity of pain, the distress it is causing you and the way it interferes with your normal everyday activities.
- Seek physiotherapy treatment to reduce inflammation and receive advice on specialist strengthening exercises
- Hydrotherapy – weight bearing exercise (joints are supported in water)
- Surgery – on the advice of your Consultant.



Elbows

The main problems affecting the elbow joint are arthritis and bursitis. Bursitis is an inflammatory condition caused by injury or infection and commonly occurs around joints or where, in the body, ligaments and tendons pass over bone.

Wrists and Hands

One of the most troublesome conditions to affect the wrist and hands in SCI is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. These are the words of one SIA member who had both hands operated on at the same time for this condition:

TREAT PAIN APPROPRIATELY AND DON'T IGNORE IT!

Being a T4 Paraplegic, my work was increasingly placing me in situations where I faced difficulty in pushing my wheelchair with increased likelihood of severe pain which then resulted in increased spasms. I have now succumbed to the use of power but have taken the option of power assisted wheels...not a fully powered wheelchair...I am still able to push my manual wheelchair for short distances without the use of power but when I need assistance the power is there to help me...it has made a huge difference to me. I no longer suffer the pain in the shoulders and I now no longer avoid pushing long distances.

The short term inconvenience of the operation is worth it. I felt frustrated as my independence was affected, but my determination to regain that independence and full strength lead to a good recovery and increasing confidence!!

Recovery from any surgery must be taken slowly to avoid further damage to soft tissue. Make plans well in advance to cater for the loss of independence during recovery, with extra help and aids.

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