

LIVING WITH SCI

FACTSHEETS

sia spinal
injuries
association
FOR LIFE AFTER SPINAL CORD INJURY



WHAT IS SPINAL CORD INJURY?

What is spinal cord injury (SCI)?

The spinal cord is an extension of the brain and is made up of a thick bundle of nerves. The nerves carry messages from our brain to the rest of our body. These messages help us to move our body, feel pressure and control vital functions like breathing, blood pressure, bladder and bowels. When the spinal cord is damaged, the communication between our brain and the rest of our body is disrupted, resulting in a loss of movement and sensation from below the level of injury. Damage to the spinal cord can be caused by a trauma like an accident, or as a result of infection or disease.

How will spinal cord injury affect my body?

The higher up you damage the spinal cord, the more movement and sensation will be lost.

- Damage to your spinal cord in your back will result in paraplegia. Paraplegia affects the movement and sensation in your legs and possibly some stomach muscles.
- Damage to the spinal cord in your neck will result in tetraplegia. Tetraplegia affects movement and sensation in all four limbs, as well as stomach and some chest muscles.

It is important to be aware that the loss of movement and sensation will vary from person to person, even with those who have damaged their spinal cord in the same place.

What are the letters and numbers healthcare professionals keep mentioning?

The use of letters and numbers refers to the level of your injury. If you have injured the spinal cord in your neck, you will have injured one of your cervical nerves (1-8). An injury like this would be referred to as C1 etc. If you have injured the spinal cord in your back, you will have injured either thoracic nerves (1-12) or lumbar nerves (1-5). A back injury would be referred to as T6, L1 etc.

What does complete/incomplete mean?

Complete or incomplete injury refers to the type of injury you have sustained. If both sides of your body are affected and there is no muscle function or voluntary movement or sensation from the injury level and below, then your injury is complete. Healthcare professionals might refer to your injury as C1/T6/L3 complete. If you have some muscle function below your injury, such as being able to move one limb or you still have some sensation then your injury is incomplete. Healthcare professionals might refer to your injury as C2/T8/L2 incomplete. As emergency and medical treatment advances, incomplete injuries are more common.

How long will I be in hospital / in a Spinal Cord Injury Centre?

After your initial injury you are likely to be in hospital for a period of three to nine months, depending on your level of injury, to recover and rehabilitate. It is not possible to be exact with the length of time, as it will vary according to your

individual needs.

When will I get better?

It may take approximately two years for you to reach your full potential following your injury. As the spinal cord recovers from the shock of the injury, you may make some progress with movement and/or sensation. Although progress and adaptation is possible, it is important to remember that there is not yet any repair for spinal cord injury, but research into this continues.

What will I be able to do in the future?

Although spinal cord injury may disrupt the plans and activities you had, life does go on and it can be as rich and fulfilling as before.

Even though sex and fertility can be affected, both spinal cord injured men and women can go on to have satisfying sex lives and can become parents.

Some people return to their previous jobs, whilst others use the opportunity to retrain for a new profession, volunteer and/or start new hobbies.

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SIA Registered Charity Number: 1054097

ABOUT SIA



The Spinal Injuries Association (SIA) is the leading national user-led charity for spinal cord injured (SCI) people. Being user led, we are well placed to understand the everyday needs of living with spinal cord injury and are here to meet those needs by providing key services to share information and experiences, and to campaign for change ensuring each person can lead a full and active life. We are here to support you from the moment your spinal cord injury happens, and for the rest of your life.

For more information contact us via the following:

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T: 0800 980 0501 (Freephone Advice Line, Mon – Fri, 11am – 1pm/2pm – 4.30pm)

W: www.spinal.co.uk

E: sia@spinal.co.uk

Charity No: 1054097

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PLEASE SUPPORT SIA



SIA relies on fundraising, donations and gifts in wills to provide services that help spinal cord injured people rebuild their lives.

With your help, we can provide the right support to spinal cord injured people and their families and friends so they can enjoy a full and independent life after injury. Your donation today will go towards changing someone's life.

I would like to give: £15 £20 £53 other amount £.....

Method of payment

I enclose a cheque/postal order/CAF voucher made payable to Spinal Injuries Association.

I would like to pay by Mastercard/Visa/Maestro/Switch (delete as appropriate)

Card number

Start date Expiry Date Security Code

Signature Date/...../.....

Name.....

Address

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Postcode Tel no.....

Email address.....

Please gift aid my donation

If you tick the box it means for every £1 you donate we can claim an extra 25p from the taxman, at no extra cost to you. You need to pay an amount of income tax or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax we reclaim from HM Revenue and Customs – currently 25p in every £1 you give.

Please send your donation to: FREEPOST SPINAL INJURIES ASSOCIATION or you can donate online at www.spinal.co.uk

Thank you for your support!