

AGEING WELL

FACTSHEETS

sia spinal
injuries
association
FOR LIFE AFTER SPINAL CORD INJURY



SHOULDER PAIN

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
- 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.

Make Changes Before Damage Occurs

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.



TREAT PAIN APPROPRIATELY AND DON'T IGNORE IT!

“Being 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.” T4 Paraplegic

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:

“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!!” T7 Paraplegic



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.

Disclaimer

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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.

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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.

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Thank you for your support!