

# AGEING WELL

## FACTSHEETS

**sia** spinal  
injuries  
association  
FOR LIFE AFTER SPINAL CORD INJURY



## BOWEL CARE

### 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.

[www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel/index.html#who-eligible](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel/index.html#who-eligible)

Find out about symptoms and diagnosis of bowel cancer at:

[www.bowelcancer.tv](http://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](http://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:

**T: 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 [www.colostomyassociation.org.uk](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&Bowel Community**  
**T: 01926 357220**  
**W: [www.bladderandbowel.org/](http://www.bladderandbowel.org/)**

**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.

For more information contact us via the following:

Spinal Injuries Association  
SIA House  
2 Trueman Place  
Oldbrook  
Milton Keynes  
MK6 2HH

**T:** 01908 604 191 (Mon – Fri 9am – 5pm)

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

**W:** [www.spinal.co.uk](http://www.spinal.co.uk)

**E:** [sia@spinal.co.uk](mailto: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)

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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](http://www.spinal.co.uk)

**Thank you for your support!**