MIND MATTERS

sia spinal injuries association
for life after spinal cord injury

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

FACTSHEET



This factsheet explains:

- General emotional responses
- Common emotional experiences after SCI
- Relationships and social interactions
- Support and sharing
- Therapy and external help
- Types of therapy and professionals
- Practical aspects of therapy
- Costs
- Duration and ending therapy
- Online and digital therapy options

This factsheet is designed to support individuals living with spinal cord injury (SCI), along with their families and friends. It offers clear guidance to help individuals understand the clinical, psychological and social aspects of spinal cord injury, and to feel more confident navigating daily life, healthcare decisions and long-term wellbeing.



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Your feelings are normal

When someone has a spinal cord injury, it changes their life in a big way. Everyone feels different things, and that's okay. Some people feel ready to get on with life quickly. Others need more time to get used to what has happened.

Remember:

- Your feelings are normal after what you've been through
- You're not alone - other people with SCI feel the same way
- It can help to talk to someone about how you feel

What feelings might you have?

Shock and not believing it's real

At first, you might find it hard to understand what's happened to you. You might feel confused or surprised by your strong feelings. This is normal.

Feeling sad or down

You might feel sad about what you've lost. You might cry more than usual or feel like you don't want to do things you used to enjoy. This is called depression, and it's a normal reaction.

Feeling angry

You might feel angry at yourself, at doctors, at your family, or even at your God. You might think 'this isn't fair!' All of these angry feelings are okay to have.

Feeling guilty

You might blame yourself for your injury or worry that you're now a burden on your family. These feelings are common but remember - it's not your fault.

How your family might feel

Your family will have their own feelings too. They might be:

- Scared about what will happen
- Sad about the changes
- Worried about how to help you
- Confused about what to do

Sometimes family members don't know what to say, so they might act differently around you.

Friends and other people

Some friends might not know how to act around you now. They might:

- Be too cheerful or try to protect you too much
- Stay away because they don't know what to say
- Stare or act strangely around you

Remember, this is usually because they don't understand what you're going through, not because they don't care about you.



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Getting help

When might you need help

You might want to talk to someone if you:

- Always feel unhappy
- Can't sleep or feel very tired
- Find it hard to talk to your family or friends
- Feel lonely, moody, or very worried
- Feel very angry all the time

Who can help?

Counsellors and therapists are people trained to help you talk through your feelings. They listen without judging you and can help you understand your feelings better.

Different types of helpers:

- Counsellors help with immediate problems and feelings
- Therapists do deeper work that might take longer
- Psychologists have special training and qualifications

What happens in therapy?

- You talk about your feelings and thoughts
- The therapist listens and helps you understand things better
- You work together to find ways to feel better
- Sessions usually last about 50 minutes
- You might meet once a week

Important: A good therapist will never tell you what to do. They help you find your own answers.

How to find help

Free help:

- Ask your doctor to refer you to an NHS therapist
- Contact SIA (Spinal Injuries Association) on 01908 604 191
- Use the free SIA support line: 0800 980 0501 (Monday - Friday, 10am - 4:00pm)
  Email: support@spinal.co.uk

Private help:

- You can pay to see a therapist privately
- Prices range from £20-£100 per hour
- Make sure your therapist is properly qualified and registered

Online help

You can also get help online through:

- Video calls (like Zoom or Skype)
- Email counselling
- Online programmes that teach coping skills

Important things to remember

1. You're in control. You can stop therapy anytime if you don't feel comfortable
2. It's private. What you say to your therapist stays between you and them
3. It takes time. Healing emotional pain takes time, just like healing physical injuries
4. You're not alone. Many people with SCI have similar feelings
5. It gets better. With time and support, most people learn to live happy, full lives

Getting the right help

Make sure any therapist you see is properly trained and registered with organisations like:

- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)
- British Psychological Society (BPS)
- United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

You can find qualified therapists at: **bacp.co.uk/about-therapy/how-to-find-a-therapist**

Remember: It's brave to ask for help when you need it. Taking care of your mental health is just as important as taking care of your physical health.

Quotes

"I was suicidal for months in the early stages, but my wife called my bluff and asked me to put an end to the misery/threats/nastiness. I found I didn't really want to die – I just wanted the pain and suffering to stop."
Person with T5/6 SCI

"Six weeks after my injury, I had a really black day, when I cried and cried. I can't remember what had triggered it, perhaps just the dawn of realisation. I was left alone. I felt so conspicuous, laid in my bed with no privacy. It was awful. You do get your soul laid bare in that situation. Outwardly, I managed really well. Inwardly, I was a wreck. I did everything I had to do: get on my feet, built up my strength, learned to take over my bodily functions. I was a grade-A student – with a timebomb ticking away inside me."
Person with T10 SCI

"My family were brilliant. Still are. Considering we were all bruised and new to this trauma, we all did so well. Dad was great with the practicalities, overseeing the living and driving arrangements; mum had a day off work during the week when we shopped or visited friends whose houses I could get into, but none of us was very good at talking about the way the trauma affected us, so it was rarely mentioned. If it did slip into the conversation, it was like someone had picked at a scab and made it bleed."
Person with T10 SCI

"My sons (age six and five at the time) were very upset to begin with. They kept hoping I would walk again, but after a few months of being at home, we settled into a routine of what I could and couldn't do, and they were very helpful. They showed more depth of understanding than their father and took everything in their stride, accepting that mum's bladder and bowels did not work like before without any problem and without broadcasting the fact to the world as young children can do. They were a great comfort."
Person with SCI

"We did not receive any counselling other than little chats with a very unsympathetic consultant. He took great pains to tell my husband that our life would be totally changed, and it would be very difficult to look after me. In fact, I found his attitude very negative. He even went so far as to say I would not be able to look after myself, let alone my sons. I was so incensed I hardly spoke to him again. I was determined to prove him wrong and moved heaven and earth to do things my way. We found chatting to ward sisters and nurses, OTs and physios more helpful."
Person with SCI

"Many people have to meet me several times before they meet me, not the wheelchair."
Person with T5/6 SCI

"'I felt terrific resentment and a powerful determination to get my own back on life and anyone who was negative towards me. I was furious with everybody who would not cooperate, but everything became normal and settled down as the years went by."
Person with T9/10 SCI

"When I first arrived at the spinal unit, 150 miles from home, one week after the accident, my husband was able to stay with me for the first three days. After he left, I felt very low and deserted. I have never forgotten the kindness of a staff nurse who came just to talk and soften the blow. One thing, in particular, she said has stayed with me: 'Remember not to mind anything that is done to your body while you're here or what your body does to you.' I had always been so independent, and it had never occurred to me that I could lose control of my bodily functions."
Person with C6/7 incomplete SCI

"When my husband was first injured, I thought he was coping quite well. He seemed cheerful enough and downplayed what had happened to him. Now he criticises everything and everyone and is impossible to please. Sometimes his outbursts are quite violent."
Person with SCI

"My eldest has seemed to pretty much take the wheelchair in his stride, but I know he still prays at night – bless his heart – not always for a miracle, sometimes just to ask God to make my pain go away. My second son has had a much harder time, regularly asking me to 'just try to walk'. He sees the legs there and can't really take in why they don't work. When the accident occurred, my husband made a puppet for them and then cut the string that made the legs work – we think it may have helped them understand a bit better. He has also been teased a bit at school, and he intensely dislikes the time it takes to do anything or go anywhere and then having to enter at a different time or entrance to everyone else. C'est la vie."
Person with T11 SCI

"In the early period after injury, I felt upset, naturally, but I also felt life had given me a challenge. I knew from (when the accident occurred) that I was paralysed, but I had to ask the doctors what the situation was, as far as how permanent it all was. When told the position, I decided not to think about what I couldn't do any more, but to concentrate on what I could."
Person with C5/C6 SCI



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Where you can get help:

SIA support line

The helpline offers specialist advice on matters such as housing, benefits and care packages. Freephone, open Monday - Friday 10.00am - 4.00pm.

T: 0800 980 0501

SIA specialist counselling service

A unique service delivered by qualified counsellors with lived experience. Once a relative has been discharged from hospital, SIA offers continuing support with a counselling service available for people with SCI and their relatives in the United Kingdom. The service is open five days a week, offering up to 10 free sessions with a therapist who has SCI themselves. Please call the support line to arrange a call from the counsellor.

The following organisations can also help you find a counsellor in your area:

British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

The BACP can provide advice on a range of services to help meet the needs of anyone seeking information about counselling and psychotherapy. It is the largest and broadest governing body within the counselling sector.
BACP House, 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth, Leicestershire, LE17 4HB

bacp.co.uk
E: bacp@bacp.co.uk
T: 0870 443 5252

British Psychological Society (BPS)

The BPS is the representative body for psychologists and psychology in the UK. The society has national responsibility for the development, promotion and application of psychology for the national good and aims to raise standards of training and practice in the application of psychology. You can contact the BPS directly or use the website to find a psychologist in your area.
St Andrew's House, 58 Princess Road East, Leicester, LE1 7DR

bps.org.uk
E: enquiries@bps.org.uk
T: 0116 254 9568

National Council of Integrative Psychotherapists (NCIP)

The NCIP is a national association of therapists, mainly in private practice, to whom the public may confidentially refer. Most schools of psychological thought are represented, and a wide variety of therapeutic approaches are offered. Find therapists in your area using the search form on the website's homepage.
PO Box 7219, Heanor, DE75 9AG

the-ncip.org
E: info@the-ncip.org
T: 0300 365 3635

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Samaritans

Samaritans is a national charity providing confidential, non-judgemental and emotional support 24 hours a day for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those that could lead to suicide. A Samaritan is also there to talk to you if you are worried about something, feel upset or confused, or just want to talk. Samaritans offers its service by telephone, email and letter.

samaritans.org
E: jo@samaritans.org
T: 116 123

United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

The UKCP regards the regulation of psychotherapists and the public accountability of their practice as of paramount importance and promotes and maintains the profession of psychotherapy to the highest standards. This is to safeguard the interests of patients and clients and the reputation of registered practitioners. The National Register of Psychotherapists is published annually. You can find a UKCP-approved psychotherapist in your area by visiting the website or contacting the UKCP directly.
2 America Square, London, EC3N 2LU

psychotherapy.org.uk
T: 020 7014 9955



For more information, contact us at:
Spinal Injuries Association, SIA House, 2 Trueman Place,
Milton Keynes, MK6 2HH
0800 980 0501 *(freephone support line open Mon-Fri 10.00am-4.00pm)*
support@spinal.co.uk

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About SIA

Spinal Injuries Association (SIA) is the UK's leading charity for everyone affected by spinal cord injury. We provide free, specialist support to help you navigate the mental and physical challenges you may face now and throughout your life.

Our nationwide team can connect you with our trusted network of experts and partners, offering guidance on legal matters, care, housing, finance, mental health and more. You can reach our support line on **0800 980 0501**.

We are the voice of people with spinal cord injury. Through our expertise we can connect you to the services and organisations you need through our network for all. Join the SIA community for free at **www.spinal.co.uk**

Tell us what you think
If you have any comments about our publications, you can email **academy@spinal.co.uk**

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This publication has been reviewed for accuracy and updated by:
- **our Clinical Team**
- **our Health & Care Advisory Group**

Review date: November 2027
Charity No: 1054097