Sexual Functioning and Reproductive Health

General information:

• Research shows that regaining sexual function is a high priority for both men and women with SCI.
• Sexuality is an expression of both physical and emotional intimacy, and will likely remain or become an important part of your life after SCI.
• Rehabilitation professionals specializing in SCI (medical providers, therapists, nurses, and psychologists) can talk to you about your concerns, provide information relevant to your situation, and help you find other resources.
• Follow these safety measures when having sex:
  • Empty your bowel and bladder before engaging in sexual activity.
  • Be careful to protect your skin during sex.
  • Be aware of the signs and symptoms of autonomic dysreflexia (AD).
  • Consider using barrier protection (condoms and other products) to prevent transmission of sexually transmitted disease, or if you would like to prevent pregnancy.

Male sexual functioning and fertility

• Many men have changes in their ability to have an erection or ejaculate after SCI. A medical provider with knowledge of SCI can discuss a range of treatment options.
• Fertility can be affected by a combination of erectile dysfunction, changes in the ability to ejaculate, and reduced semen quality. Talk to a physician familiar with SCI and fertility if you want to have children, as several options exist to enable men with SCI to father a child. These have good success rates, although more steps and preparation may be needed.

Female sexual functioning and fertility

• The primary change in sexual function for women after SCI is a decline in vaginal lubrication. Water-based lubricants are a safe and effective way to improve lubrication.
• Although sensation in the genital areas may be affected, orgasmic feelings are possible for many women with SCI, regardless of injury level or severity.
• Women often stop menstruating for several months after injury. Consult with a physician if it lasts longer than six months, or if you believe you could be pregnant.
• Female fertility is not typically affected by SCI and you should use birth control if you do not want to become pregnant.
• Do not use oil-based lubricants (such as petroleum jelly, baby oil or body lotion) if using condoms, since this can damage the condoms and decrease protection against pregnancy and disease.
• If you want to become pregnant, work with a high risk obstetrician and a rehabilitation medicine physician to make sure you stay healthy throughout your pregnancy and during labor and delivery.
# Sexual Functioning and Reproductive Health

## Resources for patients:

- **Northwest Regional SCI System Forum Videos**
  [http://sci.washington.edu/videos](http://sci.washington.edu/videos)
  - Love & Marriage after Spinal Cord Injury
  - It Happened to Both of Us: Conversations with Couples
  - Conversations from the Bedroom: Sex after Spinal Cord Injury
  - Communication in Dating & Relationships after Spinal Cord Injury
  - Sexability

- **Facing Disability Videos about Sex and Fertility**
  - Marriage and Children
  - What sex advice and information was most helpful
  - Sex and Dating

- **Online Forum for people with SCI**

- **Women’s reproductive health and sexuality**

- **Family and Personal relationships**

- **Videos about Reproductive Health for Women with SCI**

- **Sexuality and Sexual Function after SCI**
  Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center. (n.d.). Sexuality and Sexual Function after SCI.

- **Pregnancy and Women with SCI**
  Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center. (n.d.). Pregnancy and Women with SCI.
Sexual Functioning and Reproductive Health

Resources for health care providers:


Authors:
Leslie Fox, OTR/L
Deborah A. Crane, MD, MPH
UW Medicine SCI Core Group

Maria Regina Reyes, MD- Editor/Project Director