

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.

Resources for patients:

- Northwest Regional SCI System Forum 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
<http://www.facingdisability.com/spinal-cord-injury-resources/categories/sex-and-fertility-information>
 - *Marriage and Children*
 - *What sex advice and information was most helpful*
 - *Sex and Dating*
- Online Forum for people with SCI
<http://sci.rutgers.edu/forum/forumdisplay.php?26-Family>
Care Cure Community. (2017). Forum: Family.
- Women's reproductive health and sexuality
<http://www.spinalcord.org/resource-center/askus/index.php?pg=kb.chapter&id=360>
United Spinal Association. (2015) Women's reproductive health and sexuality.
- Family and Personal relationships
<http://www.spinalcord.org/resource-center/askus/index.php?pg=kb.book&id=69>
United Spinal Association. (2015) Family and Personal Relationships.
- Videos about Reproductive Health for Women with SCI
<https://www.uab.edu/medicine/sci/uab-scims-information/reproductive-health-for-women-with-spinal-cord-injury-video-series>
University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, et al. (n.d.). Reproductive Health for Women with Spinal Cord Injury Videos.
- Sexuality and Sexual Function after SCI
<http://www.msktc.org/sci/factsheets/sexuality>
Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center. (n.d.). Sexuality and Sexual Function after SCI.
- Pregnancy and Women with SCI
http://www.msktc.org/lib/docs/Factsheets/SCI_and_Pregnancy_.pdf
Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center.(n.d.). Pregnancy and Women with SCI.

Resources for health care providers:

- Consortium for Spinal Cord Medicine. (2010). *Sexuality and Reproductive Health in Adults with Spinal Cord Injury: A Clinical Practice Guideline for Health-Care Professionals*. Washington, D.C.: Paralyzed Veterans of America. Retrieved from <http://www.pva.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=281967d4-249b-4922-8e8f-bf30b4be9494>
- Spinal Cord Injury Research Evidence (SCIRE) Project. (2016). Sexual and Reproductive Health. Retrieved from <http://www.scireproject.com/rehabilitation-evidence/sexual-and-reproductive-health>

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Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace the advice from a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment.

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