

Living With Spinal Cord Injury



A spinal cord injury (SCI) can result from trauma, such as a motor vehicle accident, violence, or a fall; or a disease or disorder, such as a tumor or virus, that affects the spinal cord's ability to send and receive messages to and from the brain. About 200,000 people in the United States have spinal cord injuries. Most injuries occur from a traumatic event, according to the National Spinal Cord Injury Association, and most of these injuries occur in men.

A person with SCI typically has some paralysis and decreased or loss of sensation below the level of injury. Depending on the severity of a person's spinal cord injury, an occupational therapist can provide treatment in a hospital, clinic, or at home that allows the person to become as independent as possible. With proper treatment, thousands of people with SCI have continued to lead happy and productive lives.

What can an occupational therapist do?

- **Evaluate** a person's ability and level of functioning in his or her home, at work, and while engaging in leisure activities and hobbies.
- **Determine** how motivated a person is to participate in activities that he or she participated in prior to the injury.
- **Identify** any changes in roles a person may experience as a result of SCI.
- **Provide** individualized therapy to retrain people to perform daily living skills using adaptive techniques.
- **Facilitate** coping skills that could help a person overcome the effects of SCI.
- **Implement** exercises and routines that strengthen muscles that may have been affected that are necessary in daily activities, such as dressing, eating, and taking care of a home.
- **Determine** the type of assistive devices that could help a person become more independent with daily living skills.

What can persons with spinal cord injuries and their friends and families do?

- **Get involved** in the rehabilitation process. A person with a spinal cord injury and his or her family members should be active participants in his or her recovery and rehabilitation.
- **Choose** health care providers who specialize in spinal cord injury care.
- **Provide** emotional support during a person's recovery and rehabilitation. Friends and family members should encourage a person with SCI so that he or she achieves and maintains as much independence as possible.
- **Use** resources available to the injured persons and their families that help in understanding SCI and help in planning recovery, rehabilitation, and integration back into the community.

Need more information?

If you would like to consult an occupational therapist about spinal cord injury, practitioners are available through spinal injury centers, most rehabilitation hospitals, medical centers, and clinics.

with a broad range of physical, developmental, and behavioral issues in addition to spinal cord injury, such as arthritis, chronic pain, and mood disorders. Practitioners also help clients in wellness techniques that may prevent injury and disease.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are trained in helping both adults and children

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