

Q. Can people with spinal cord injury work?

A. Yes, people with SCI work in many different occupations. Immediately following



injury, most people need time to sort out new daily challenges. New skills may need to be developed to return to work. Federal and local programs and agencies offer services to help people with SCI. For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act has promoted changes in the workplace environment and helped people with SCI and other disabilities return to employment in mainstream society. The rehabilitation team at Rancho is also ready to help people with SCI explore future work options.

The statistics in this brochure is based on data listed by the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation (03/01/02).

Disclaimer: This information is for health educational purposes only. If you have questions, you should ask your doctor, nurse, or other persons who you see for your health care needs. Each clinician caring for the patient is responsible to determine the most appropriate care.

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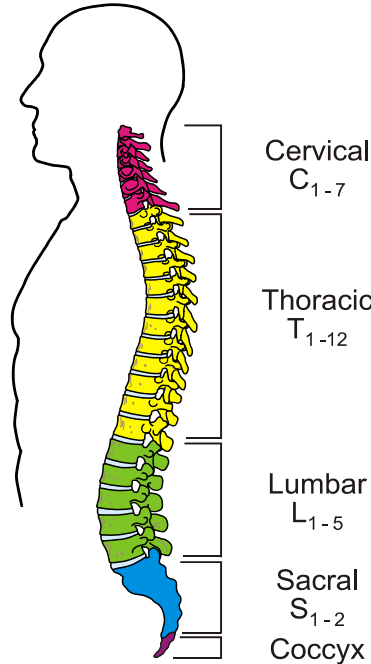
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Spinal Cord Injury



Questions & Answers



**Rancho Los Amigos
National Rehabilitation Center**

"The State of the Art in Medical Rehabilitation"

Q. How many people have spinal cord injuries?

A. Close to 11,000 new spinal cord injuries (SCI) occur every year. About 250,000 people with SCI are living in the United States. Over half are between 16 - 30 years of age. The main causes for SCI include:

- motor vehicle accidents (44%),
- violence (26%),
- falls (22%).
- sports injuries (7%)
- other accidents (1%)



Q. What is a complete or an incomplete injury?

A. The spinal cord is divided into cervical, thoracic, lumbar and sacral segments. The level of injury refers to the site of spinal cord injury. For example, a C5-6 injury means that injury occurred in the cervical spinal cord.

A **complete injury** means that there is no movement or feeling below the level of injury, including the sacral segments (S4-S5, the lowest segments of spinal cord).

With an **incomplete injury**, a person may be able to feel or move some parts of the body below the level of injury. There is preservation of function in sacral segments (S4-S5). Recovery is variable.

Q. Besides loss of movement and sensation, what are other changes caused by SCI?

- A.** SCI may be associated with
- low blood pressure
 - difficulty controlling blood pressure
 - difficulty controlling body temperature
 - difficulty sweating below the level of injury
 - bowel and bladder dysfunction
 - increased risk of pressure sores
 - chronic pain
 - difficulty regulating breathing



Q. Does SCI affect sexual function and fertility?

A. For individuals with spinal cord injury, it is possible to have an active and satisfying sex life. Be sure to consult a physician experienced in SCI for your medical needs.



Male fertility may be reduced but it is still possible for men with spinal cord injury to have their own children.

Female fertility may be affected in the first months after injury. However, women usually regain their ability to become pregnant and to carry babies to full term.

Q. Do people with a traumatic SCI ever get better?

A. As an immediate reaction to injury, the spinal cord becomes inflamed and swells. When the swelling goes down, some neurological function may return. This window of recovery usually takes place during the first few months. Unfortunately, very few people with SCI fully recover total motor and sensory function.

Q. Does SCI decrease life expectancy?

A. About 90% of people with SCI survive. Many of them live nearly as long a life as people who do not have such an injury. But people with SCI do face special challenges.

Urinary tract infections and **pressure sores** are more common in people with spinal cord injury. **Pneumonia** and **respiratory infections** are more common among people who use ventilators. Rehabilitation facilities specialized in SCI can help reduce these problems.

Many people with spinal cord injury have lived long, healthy, and happy lives. Important keys are keeping informed and taking an active and positive attitude toward health.

