

Did you know ...

About one half of spinal cord injuries result in quadriplegia.³

Males are twice as likely to suffer a spinal cord injury than females.³

In Alberta the average age when spinal cord injuries occur is 38.⁴

What is a Spinal Cord Injury?

The spinal cord is a special set of nerves that run down the human back through the spinal column and carries signals from the limbs to the brain. It is a very thin, fragile cord and is about the width of a person's finger. If the spinal cord is injured or broken, these signals cannot get through and the body will not function properly.

Spinal cord injuries can cause:

- Loss of sensation
- Loss of movement
- Lack of bowel and bladder function
- Uncontrolled muscle spasms

Terms often associated with spinal cord injury:

Paralysis – the loss of function or inability to move.

Paraplegia – the result of damage to the spinal cord that causes paralysis of the legs and possibly the trunk of the body.

Quadriplegia – the result of damage to the spinal cord that causes paralysis of both the arms and the legs

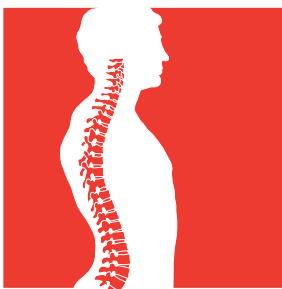
Causes and Prevention of Spinal Cord Injuries

Many spinal cord injuries are the result of the spinal cord being partially or completely damaged; this could be the result of a blow to the spine, causing spinal cord bruising, or due to severed cord.

Motor-Vehicle Collisions: In a vehicle, wear seatbelts, obey speed limits and never drink and drive.

Trampolines: Supervise children at all times, allow only one person on at a time, do not attempt high risk moves without proper training or equipment, and make sure there is proper padding covering the springs and surrounding landing areas.¹

(continued on other side)



1 American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. (1999) <http://www.aaos.org/wordhtml/papers/position/trampoli.htm>
 2 St. John Ambulance www.stjohn.ab.ca
 3 ThinkFirst http://www.medi-fax.com/thinkfirst/ya_know.html
 4 Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research (1997) inpatient hospitalizations

Spinal cord injuries can be accompanied by brain injury if the person receives a blow to the head.

Sport and Recreation Activities: Wear the approved helmet and proper equipment for the sport or leisure activity you are participating in. Survey the playing area for hazards and ensure that your equipment is in proper working condition. Participate in activities within your skill range.

Diving: Never dive into unknown or shallow water. Never dive alone, and avoid using alcohol around swimming pools or lakes.

Falls: Clear obstacles such as toys, clothes and boxes from all stairs and pathways. Ensure sidewalks and driveways are clear of ice and snow, and make sure your footwear has proper grips for the winter.

What to do in the event of a Spinal Cord Injury

Completing a St. John Ambulance first aid course will help you to be prepared to help in an emergency situation.

Follow these guidelines provided by St. John Ambulance:²

- When you suspect someone has suffered a possible head or spinal cord injury, tell the injured person **NOT TO MOVE** and send for medical help immediately.
- Do not move the person. Steady and support the head and neck in the position you found them in.
- Practice standard first aid techniques and make sure the person has an open **AIRWAY**, is **BREATHING** and has **CIRCULATION** while maintaining the support for the head and neck at all times.

Spinal Cord Injury is forever – prevention is the best defence.

Spinal cord safety in Alberta is a shared responsibility.

If you would like more information on this topic, contact:

Canadian Paraplegic Association • phone (780) 424-6312 • www.canparaplegic.org

St. John Ambulance • phone (780) 452-6565

The Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research (ACICR) provides coordination and support for organizations and professionals in injury control.
phone (780) 492 -6019 • fax (780) 492-7154 • acicr@ualberta.ca

To receive additional copies of this Act sheet, contact the Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research or check out our website at www.med.ualberta.ca/acicr

