

Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Card for Primary Healthcare Providers

1. Urological System

- must have routine renal urological studies; asymptomatic patients should have ultrasound every five years or sooner
- asymptomatic bacteriuria in patients using catheters should not be treated routinely; symptomatic bacteriuria should be treated promptly
- prompt treatment of symptomatic UTIs; symptoms may be vague
- monitor acidity level in the urine to prevent bladder infections; recommend the use of high doses of Vitamin C

2. Skin Care

- prompt treatment of small areas of skin breakdown
- cease weight bearing until area is healed
- surgical decubitus care: refer to reconstructive surgeon
- note that aging process increases risk of skin breakdown
- proper seating and cushion are critical

3. Respiratory System

- timely and aggressive treatment of minor URIs (colds)
- consider early referral for respiratory therapy

4. Musculoskeletal System

- routinely evaluate and prescribe wheelchair and other durable medical equipment
- home therapy program, annual evaluation by physical therapist and occupational therapist
- include energy conservation and reduce exposure to joint stress
- prevent cumulative trauma disorders (joints, tendons)
- recognize early osteoporosis
- normal aging impact is accelerated in SCI patients

5. Metabolic System

- optimum nutrition to prevent obesity — an increased risk factor for diabetes, hypertension, and cardiac disease
- excessively cool or excessively hot — elevated temperatures can be caused by environmental impact

6. Neurologic System

Autonomic dysreflexia: SCI level T-6 or above

- potential medical emergency
- recognition of symptoms and signs which can include high blood pressure, headache, flushed sweaty face, cold/pale body and limbs, slow or irregular pulse
- consider medications, including calcium channel blockers and anti-hypertensive medications, if life-threatening symptoms continue

causes:

- distended or irritated bladder, blocked catheter
- fecal impaction
- any trauma below level of SCI

7. Cardiovascular System

- normal blood pressure in people with SCI is often in the 90-100 systolic range
- consider using abdominal binders and elastic hose to reduce venous pooling in lower extremities

Complications in SCI can be extremely subtle. **Any** changes reported should be explored. Studies indicate that individuals with SCI may be at higher risk for diabetes, breast cancer, alcohol abuse, or bladder cancer.

Aging effects can be compounded by SCI and functional impact may be more devastating. All physical changes (e.g., altered spasticity, unexplained fevers, change in general status) should be explored. **LISTEN** to the patients — they know their bodies!

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