

Glossary of Spinal Injury Terms

ADL: Activities of daily living: dressing, eating, getting in and out of bed, etc.

Advocate: Someone who represents you and who speaks out with your best interest in mind.

Anticholinergic: Type of drug prescribed to reduce spasms of smooth muscle, especially the bladder.

Arteriovenous malformation (AVM)
Congenital disorder characterized by a complex tangled web of arteries and veins.

ASIA score: Measure from A-E of sensory and motor function after spinal cord injury; used by physicians. "A" means complete injury no motor or sensory function; "E" means motor and sensory function are normal.

Atrophy: Loss of bulk in a muscle, nerve or organ from less than normal usage or from previous damage.

Autonomic Dysreflexia: Potentially fatal complication of spinal cord injuries that involves episodes of extreme hypertension and sometimes leads to intracranial haemorrhage or stroke. It occurs in 90% of people with cervical or high thoracic cord injuries.

Bipap
Bi-level positive airway pressure, a non-invasive means of assisted breathing using a mask, usually used to treat sleep apnoea.

Bladder Augmentation: Surgical procedure using a portion of the intestine to expand bladder capacity in people who are incontinent; makes possible the use of intermittent catheterization.

Cervical: Refers to the part of the spine in the neck region.C1-C7

Coccyx: The bottom tip of the spine; the tailbone.

Colostomy : A surgical procedure to facilitate emptying the bowel through the wall of the abdomen.

Cystogram: An X-ray taken after injecting dye into the bladder.

Cystoscopy: Examination of the interior of the bladder with a special instrument.

Distended: The state of being stretched beyond normal capacity. Normally refers to the abdomen, bladder or bowel.

EMG: Electromyogram, a test using electronic devices that determines how well nerves and muscles are working.

ECU (environmental control unit) : A remote control unit to operate anything in a person's environment, such as computer, lights, television, bed, etc

Faecal impaction: Blockage of the bowels; a result of severe constipation.

Functional electrical stimulation (FES)
Application of low-voltage currents to enhance the function of paralysed muscles. Facilitates aerobic exercise, ambulation, handgrip, bladder control, etc.

Gait: A description of an individual's style of walking.

Heterotopic Ossification (HO) - The formation of new bone deposits in the connective tissue surrounding the major joints, primarily the hip and knee. A disorder characterized by the deposition of large quantities of calcium at the site of a bone injury. Often the result of prolonged immobilization. [heterotopic bone].

Hyperhydrosis : Excessive sweating, often seen in tetraplegics. May be caused by an overreaction of the sympathetic nervous system to an irritation below the level of injury.

Hypoxia: Condition in which cells are deprived of oxygen.

Hydronephrosis: Stretched kidney resulting from excessive reflux.

Ileostomy :Surgical procedure that opens the ileum (small intestine) to facilitate removal of faecal material through the abdomen.

Incontinence: A loss of bowel or bladder function

Intravenous pyelogram (IVP): Xray taken after injecting a dye into the vein that outlines the urinary system.

Laminectomy: An operation sometimes used to relieve pressure on the spinal cord.

Lumbar: Refers to the area of the spine at the mid to lower back.L1-L5

Motor Nerves: Nerves that carry messages to activate muscles. When motor nerves are damaged, muscles become weak or don't work at all.

Multi Disciplinary Team : A group of health care workers who are members of different disciplines (e.g. Social Worker, Occupational Therapist, Nurse), each providing specific services to the patient.

Necrosis: Cell death resulting from irreversible damage. Often seen in pressure injuries.

Neurogenic Bladder : A bladder with any disturbance due to an injury of the nervous system.

Neuropathic / Spinal Cord Pain - Neuropathic (nerve-generated) pain is a problem experienced by SCI patients. A sharp, almost electrical shock, type of pain and is the result of damage to the spine and soft tissue surrounding the spine. Phantom limb pain or radiating pain from the level of the lesion is related to the injury or dysfunction at the nerve root or spinal cord.

Occupational therapist (OT): A professional who helps patients improve their range of motion, strength, and coordination of small movements of muscles and joints in order to help them perform activities of daily living or return to work. Will prescribe equipment for an individual such as a wheelchair, splints and tools for ADL'S

Orthostatic hypotension: Pooling of blood in the lower extremities; combined with lowered blood pressure in people with spinal cord injury, results in light-headedness, numbness and/or pallor. Treated with elastic binders for the waist and elastic stocking on the legs to prevent pooling.

Osteomyelitis : Infection of bone material, often related to Pressure Injuries.

Osteoporosis: occurs when there is a loss of mineral from bone mainly in the form of calcium as well as architectural loss of normal bone structure.

Osteoporosis results in loss of bone strength, thus making bone more fragile and easily susceptible to fracture.

Very common in people with SCI

Oedema: Swelling, usually caused by the build up of fluid in a particular area most common in lower limbs

Orthosis: A device applied to the exterior of the body to support, aid, and align the body and limbs, or to influence motion by assisting, resisting, blocking, or unloading part of the body weight.

Paralysis: The inability to control movement of a part of the body.

Paraplegia: A condition involving complete/incomplete paralysis of the trunk and or lower limbs

Paresis: Incomplete paralysis or weakness of a part of the body.

Physiotherapist (PT): A professional who helps patients improve their strength, coordination and range of motion of their muscles and joints.

Poikilothermia: the inability to regulate core body temperature (as by sweating to cool off or by putting on clothes to warm up), found especially in some spinal cord injury patients and in patients under general anaesthesia.

Pressure Injury: Also known as a pressure ulcer, pressure sore, decubitus ulcer, or bed sore; a reddened area or an open sore usually found on the skin over bony areas such as the hip bone or tailbone. It is usually caused by too much pressure on those areas.

Proprioception - The sense of movement and position.

Prone: Lying flat on the stomach.

Prosthesis: An artificial substitute for a missing body part.

Range of motion: An arc of movement of a joint of the body.

Renal Reflux: The back-flow of urine from the bladder into the ureters and kidneys.

Rehabilitation: The process of recovering from, adapting to, or compensating for disabilities.

Residual: Usually refers to the amount of urine left in the bladder after voiding without a catheter.

Sacral: Refers to the lower part of the spine S1-5

SCI: Spinal cord injury, an injury to back or neck causing damage to the spinal cord, leading to paralysis.

Sensation: Physical feelings like touch, pain, temperature, pressure, or awareness of where a body part is in space.

Sensory Level and Motor Level - When the term "sensory level" is used, it refers to the lowest segment of the spinal cord with normal sensory function on both sides of the body; the motor level is similarly defined with respect to motor function.

Sitting Program: A gradual increase in sitting time with the aim to increase the skin and stamina tolerance of the client so that they are able to sit long periods eg 8-10 hours.

Sleep Apnoea: Irregular breathing or snoring, can lead to fatigue, loss of memory, poor concentration. Increased incidence among people with respiratory weakness. Treated with BiPAP or CPAP.

Spasm: A sudden, often uncontrolled, contraction of a muscle; a muscle jerk.

Spasticity - Hyperactive muscles that move or jerk involuntarily. There are some benefits to spasticity:

1. Warning mechanism to identify pain or problems in areas of no sensation.
2. Helps in spotting an oncoming urinary tract infection.
3. Helps to maintain muscle size and bone strength.
4. Helps to maintain circulation.
5. Helps to prevent osteoporosis.

Sphincter: Muscle that opens or closes i.e. the urethra or rectum.

Sphincterotomy: Surgical procedure to relax the urethral sphincter, thus improving bladder function. An alternative is the placement of a stint, which is reversible. Botox has also been used to relax the sphincter.

Suprapubic stoma: A small opening made in the bladder for urinary drainage above the pubic bone and below the navel in order of long term drainage the bladder.

Syringomyelia: Disorder caused by formation of a fluid-filled cavity (syrinx) within the spinal cord.

Syrinx : Fluid filled cavity in the spinal cord; can create pressure related to functional loss and pain.

Tetraplegia: The correct term for Quadriplegia; a condition involving complete paralysis of the legs and partial or complete paralysis of the arms. C1 –C8

Thoracic: Refers to the part of the spine at the upper-back to midback level. T1 – T12

Tone: The level of resting activity of muscles. If a leg has high tone, it is stiff and difficult to move. If a leg has low tone, it is 'floppy' and easy to move.

Urodynamics An examination that measures and compares the forces that empty the bladder with those that prevents emptying of the bladder. These measurements are used to determine when and if a catheter can be removed or if intervention is required.

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) - Bacterial invasion of the urinary tract, which includes the bladder, bladder neck, and urethra.

Ventilator: A piece of equipment that helps a person to breathe who cannot do it independently.

Vertebrae: The bones that make up the spine.