

Sexual Health After Spinal Cord Injury



Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program

You can do it, we are here to help!

Sex and sexuality are important parts of being human, however after a spinal cord injury (SCI) many things can change. The way you experience your body may be different now. Many people with a spinal cord injury are concerned about their sexuality and sexual health but don't know how, when or who to ask for information.

At Parkwood Institute, we have developed a program to provide education and support to patients regarding sexuality and sexual health. A member of your health care team will talk to you and answer any questions or concerns you may have about your sexual health. If you have a partner, they are welcome to participate in your sexual health education and ask questions. Peer Support with SCI-Ontario is also available.

We want you to feel comfortable discussing your questions and concerns with any team member. We will help you find the answers.

You are not alone. Questions and concerns about sexuality after a spinal cord injury are common. It's important to ask for help.

Topics people with SCI often wonder about

- Sexual drive / interest
- Sexual functioning abilities (achieving orgasm, ejaculation, erection, vaginal lubrication)
- Fertility and contraception
- Motor and sensory function (sexual positions, sexual aids, sensory changes, spasticity)
- Bowel / bladder function
- Relationship challenges
- Attractiveness and sexual self-esteem
- Secondary complications (e.g. autonomic dysreflexia, spasms, fatigue, depression) and medications

Frequently asked questions about sexual health after SCI

Can I still have sex?

Yes. People with SCI's can lead satisfying sex lives. You are still a sexual person after SCI. You can give and receive pleasure, have sex and experience fulfilling and satisfying relationships. While you may experience changes in your sexual function, your ability to engage in sexual activity is still possible.

Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program

Will I be able to get an erection or lubricate?

Yes. However, you may experience changes in your ability to obtain erections and/or vaginal lubrication. There are a variety of sexual devices that can assist with lubrication, erections, stimulation and pleasure.

Can I still have an orgasm?

After an injury, your experience of an orgasm may be different. Your specific erogenous zones after SCI may change, and you may need to explore your body to find out what is pleasurable.

How do I manage bowel and bladder issues during sex?

Establish a bowel and bladder regimen that works for your type of injury. A reliable and predictable routine is going to boost your confidence in social and sexual settings. Members of your team will assist you to establish a routine that is right for you.

Am I still able to have children?

Yes. In general, childbearing ability is generally not affected by SCI. However, there are some things to consider before and during pregnancy. It is recommended that an SCI specialist oversee the pregnancy. Ejaculation may also be affected, but sperm is still being made. Specific procedures are available to help with sperm retrieval if needed.

Do I still need to practice safe sex?

Yes. You still need to use contraception when having sex to avoid unwanted pregnancy. It is also important to remember that not all contraception offers protection against Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). For more information, ask one of your health care team members.

Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program

Resources about Sexual Health

We have included links and resources below that you might find helpful. We can also help you access these resources on your own device.

Resource	Website and Description
SCIRE Community: Sexual Health	http://scireproject.com/community/topic/sexual-health/ Spinal Cord Injury Research Evidence (SCIRE) Community provides free information about spinal cord injury research that is written in everyday language. This resource can help to answer FAQs related to SCI and sexual health.
Spinal Cord Injury BC Sexual Health	https://scisexualhealth.ca This is an excellent online resource providing an easy to follow overview of sexual health after a spinal cord injury.
PleasureAble: Sexual Device Manual for People with Disabilities	https://icord.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PleasureABLE-Sexual-Device-Manual-for-PWD.pdf This resource explores a variety of sexual devices, safety, positioning and lubricants.
Sex and Paralysis Video Series (Dr. M. Tepper)	Sex therapist explores sexual positions for men and women with SCI, pleasure mapping, solutions for erectile dysfunction, accessible tantra and vibrator use. https://www.drmitchelltepper.com/sex_and_paralysis_video_series

Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA): Sexuality and Reproductive Health in Adults with Spinal Cord Injury	This is a comprehensive guide for people with spinal cord injury https://pva-cdnendpoint.azureedge.net/prod/libraries/media/pva/library/publications/cpg_sexuality-and-reproductive-health.pdf
Come as You Are Spot of Delight Shop	https://www.comeasyouare.com Accessible sex toys and devices are available online or in the store
Sexuality after SCI	Videos about sex and disability, debunking myths, positioning, dating, self-esteem, fertility, redefining sex and more https://www.sexualitysci.org/
Cortree: Sex & Disability	Sex and Disability education module for patients and caregivers https://www.cortree.com/disability-education-centre/
St. Joseph's Health Care London	Video discussing frequently asked questions related to sexual health after spinal cord injury https://www.sjhc.london.on.ca/patients-and-visitors/online-patient-and-caregiver-resource-library/sexual-health-after-spinal-cord

Professional Resources in London Ontario	
Sex Therapists	<p>All sex therapists in London are registered with Board of Examiners in Sex Therapy and Counseling in Ontario</p> <p>Search by city or individual therapist on https://bestco.wildapricot.org/sex-therapists-near-you</p>
Fertility Clinic at London Health Sciences Centre	<p>Appointment for consultation by physician referral or patients can self-refer</p> <p>Phone: 519-663-2966</p>
Urology Program at St. Joseph's Hospital	<p>Dr. G. Brock and Dr. J. Campbell specialize in erectile dysfunction. Assessment and treatment options can be discussed</p> <p>Phone: 519 646-6100 ext. 66053</p>
Pelvic Health Physiotherapy: Consultation and Rehabilitation	<p>Many Physiotherapy clinics provide these services. The College of Physiotherapists has a list of all Pelvic Health Physiotherapists in Ontario. Public Register · CPO Portal (collegept.org)</p> <p>Click on Advanced Search button, under Special Activities select <i>“Assessing/Rehabilitating Pelvic Musculature”</i>. From there, you can narrow the search to your geographical area.</p>



A Spinal Cord Injury patient exercises in the gym at Parkwood Institute while his wife and son encourage him.

Your emotional and mental health

Spinal Cord Injury can affect your whole life. Maintaining intimacy with your loved one is an important way to stay connected emotionally and can help improve your mental health. If your partner is looking for resources to learn more about sexual health after SCI, they are welcome to ask the health care team.

Contact

For additional information about sexual health, talk to a member of your health care team.

**POSITIVE
SPACE**



CARING FOR THE BODY,
MIND & SPIRIT SINCE 1869



sjhc.london.on.ca

Renowned for compassionate care, St. Joseph's is one of the best academic health care organizations in Canada dedicated to helping people live to their fullest by minimizing the effects of injury, disease and disability through excellence in care, teaching and research.