



Sexual Function and Fertility

Sexual function

Sexual function is altered following SCI.

How is sexual function affected following SCI?

The main aspects of sexual function that may be affected are:

- Sensation in the genital and other areas below the injury
- Orgasm may be changed
- Ability to achieve and sustain an erection (in males)
- Ability to ejaculate (in males)
- Achieve vaginal lubrication (in females).

How can sexual problems be overcome following SCI?

While sexual activity following your injury might be different from before this does not mean that it cannot be exciting, stimulating and satisfying. You can have a sexually active life and maintain intimate relationships.

Remember:

- Sex is a natural part of life. We are all sexual beings – this has not changed simply because of the injury
- There is more to sex than just sexual intercourse – sexual activity can include foreplay, touching, caressing, oral sex, masturbation, mutual masturbation
- The inability to move much does not mean the inability to please or be pleased
- Loss of genital function and/or sensation does not mean loss of your sexuality
- Communication with your partner is very important.

Other things to remember:

- Different positions for sexual intercourse
- Bladder and bowel management
- Spasms
- Autonomic dysreflexia
- Safe sex.

Fertility

How is fertility affected?

In women, fertility is usually unaffected in the long term. Menstruation (periods) may cease in the beginning after the injury, but usually return to a normal pattern after approximately one year. The uterus (womb) works normally through conception and pregnancy.

Most medications are contra indicated to take during pregnancy or when breast feeding. It is important to check first with your spinal specialist which medication you can safely continue to take.

In men, fertility is often markedly reduced. This is because:

- Ejaculation is not possible or extremely difficult
- The quality of the sperm may be reduced.

There are treatments available for problems with:

- Achieving and sustaining an erection
- Ejaculation
- Lubrication.

Are there ways for my partner to become pregnant?

- If you are unable to ejaculate, there are ways to retrieve your sperm – with a special vibrator or with a small electric current. The sperm that are recovered by these methods can then be used to artificially inseminate your partner. Both these techniques require specialist Spinal Unit intervention.



- There are ways that you can improve the quality of your sperm with some simple changes in lifestyle, eg. optimal spinal unit intervention
- In-vitro fertilisation (IVF) techniques are available through specialist fertility clinics
- Donor insemination may be an option if other techniques are unsuitable
- Testicular aspiration (Epididymal Vas Aspiration).



Further information

For information regarding sexual function and fertility issues:

- Prince of Wales Spinal Unit will advise on fertility information, services and referral to Royal Women's Hospital (pap smears, mammograms, fertility and delivery suites)
.....**.02 9382 5832/5504/5505**
- Royal North Shore Spinal Cord Injury Unit Fertility Management and Sexual Function Clinic
.....**.02 9926 7701**
- A member of the Spinal Outreach Service (SOS)
.....**.02 9334 0400**
- Moorong Spinal Unit Royal Rehabilitation Centre
.....**.02 9808 9269**
- Your local doctor
- Your Spinal Unit
- ParaQuad Clinical Services Intake/Information Officer**.02 8741 5674**

For information regarding pregnancy – exercises, positioning and pressure relief:

- Your occupational therapist
- Your physiotherapist

For advice about modifications and equipment for women with SCI with children:

- Your occupational therapist
- Contact the Independent Living Centre NSW Inc.
.....**.1300 885 886**

For peer support:

- Contact SCI Australia
Freecall: 1800 819 775 (*outside metropolitan Sydney*)
.....**.02 9661 8855**