

Spinal Cord Injuries, Diagnosis and Disability Support



Ensuring supported independent living for those with spinal cord injuries

What is spinal cord injury?

A spinal cord injury (SCI) is damage to the spinal cord that generally causes paralysis. Paralysis can involve loss of control, function, and feeling in one or more limbs, and does not necessarily involve the whole body.

In Australia, most spinal cord injuries are **caused by accidents and traumatic injury**, but they can also be caused by certain diseases, like cancer or polio. It is imperative to enlist the help of NDIS service providers who can arrange home care services to ensure supported independent living.

Effects of SCI

The main effect of SCI is paralysis, but there are other long-term effects as well. The effects of SCI vary between people.

When the spinal cord is injured it cannot transport the brain's messages throughout the body properly, causing **different types of paralysis**. Generally, SCI causes some paralysis from the point of injury and below.

Paraplegia involves injury to the spinal cord at chest level or below, causing loss of function in the lower half of the body including the legs and feet.

Quadriplegia or Tetraplegia is caused by injury to the spinal cord above the chest, and affects the arms, hands, legs and torso. People with some types of upper SCI may require a ventilator to breathe, or assistance to speak and communicate.

Not all SCI involves the spinal cord being fully severed ('complete' SCI). In **'incomplete' SCI**, the spinal cord may be crushed or bruised, and some brain signals can still get through. This is why some people with SCI have some feeling or movement in the affected part of their body.

Other effects of spinal cord injury include:

- changes to blood pressure and body temperature
- changes to sexual and reproductive function
- digestive issues, including loss of bladder and bowel control
- breathing difficulties
- pressure sores
- spasms
- a shooting or burning pain caused by nerve damage (known as neuropathic pain)
- lowered immune function and potentially higher risk of **certain cancers**
- impact on mental health

Diagnosis

In the case of an accident or emergency situation, call 000 immediately.

If you have had concerns for a while, it is still important you contact a **doctor**.

Because most spinal cord injuries are caused by accidents, they are usually diagnosed in the hospital through **medical assessments and tests** that look at where the spinal cord has been injured, and what kind of injury it is.

There is no 'cure' for SCI, but **specialised surgeries** to improve function may be possible for some injuries. Your treating doctors will discuss relevant treatment options with you. There are also a range of disability support services which can be arranged to provide home care support and independent living.

Supports and services

The effects of SCI can have a big impact on your life, and there is assistance available.

Your long-term management plan should be unique to you. If you have been hospitalised due to your injury, the hospital might refer you to other services when you leave. It is a good idea to **find a general practitioner (GP)** you can see regularly once you leave the hospital.

You can also **apply for access** to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS provides funding for disability-related supports and services. You will need to provide **evidence of your disability** to apply. The hospital or your GP can work with you to do this, whilst disability care providers such as Claro can offer **NDIS support coordination** along with their own partners for assistance.

If you access the NDIS, you will need to start **preparing for your first NDIS planning meeting**. Think about the areas of life impacted by your disability. You might need a wheelchair or ventilator, home modifications like ramps and handrails, or dietetic supports for good nutrition. It helps to read through **supports funded by the NDIS** to get an idea of what to talk about during your first planning meeting.

Taking care of your mental health is **crucial to living with SCI**. Contact your doctor to discuss getting a **mental health treatment plan**, or contact any mental health support organisation.

You can get peer support and information about living with SCI from organisations like:

- **Spinal Cord Injuries Australia**
- **Spinal Life Australia**
- **Spinal Hub** and
- **Sane Australia**

Spinal cord injury and Claro

At Claro, we provide **disability and allied health services** tailored to your needs. Fill out our **quick and easy enquiry form** and we will contact you to talk about the right supports for you.

Whether your spinal injury impacts your ability to go about everyday tasks like cleaning and shopping, or you need more complex personal care, we will work with you to find the best options. This might include **Supported Independent Living** so you can keep living in your home independently, or connecting you with purpose-built **Specialist Disability Accommodation**.

Managing new disability supports can be challenging. If you have funding for **Support Coordination** in your NDIS plan, our experienced and knowledgeable Support Coordinators can work with you to connect you to the services you need. **Read more about our Support Coordination services.**

We also partner with **Plena Healthcare** to provide allied health services like nursing, occupational and physiotherapy, speech pathology, dietetics, podiatry and behavioural supports.

Information for carers

SCI is a big change for families, parents and carers too. It is important you get the support you need to continue caring for your loved one living with SCI. **Supports and services** are available from the government and other organisations, including **through the NDIS**, and **peer and family support**.

Resources

- **Spinal Cord Injury Australia 2017-18, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare**
- **Types of Paralysis, SpinalCord.Com**
- **Paraplegia, Better Health Channel Victoria**
- **Quadriplegia Tendon Transfer Surgery, Better Health Channel Victoria**
- **Spinal Cord Injury, Johns Hopkins Medicine**
- **Spinal Cord Injury Facts, Spinal Cure**
- **Spinal Cord Injury Australia**
- **Spinal Life Australia**
- **Spinal Hub**
- **Introduction to disability services and the NDIS**
- **The NDIS in each state**

Contact details

Claro Aged Care and Disability Services

Find us at claro.com.au
Call us on 1300 303 770

