

Sexual Health After a Spinal Cord Injury

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After a spinal cord injury (SCI), you may have a lot of questions. You may wonder how an SCI will affect your:

- › Relationships and roles (with or as a parent, peer, friend, or partner)
- › Body image
- › Sex drive (your interest in having sex)
- › Self-esteem
- › Ability to have sex

These are examples of sexual health.

You may not know what to ask. You may also feel:

- › Embarrassed
- › Nervous
- › Afraid

This is common. It can be hard to talk about your sexual health, especially if you have never talked about it before.

We are here to help.

Your rehabilitation (rehab) team is available to talk with you about any questions or concerns you may have. We are here to help you learn about life after an SCI.

Common questions

Can I still have sex?

Yes. While you may have changes in your sexual function, it is still possible to enjoy sexual activity. You can still:

- › Have sex
- › Give and have pleasure
- › Have satisfying and fulfilling relationships

Will I be able to have an erection or have vaginal lubrication (vagina becomes slippery to get ready for sex)?

Yes, but you may need to use sexual devices (like a vibrator or lubricant) to help with erections, stimulation, lubrication, and pleasure.

Can I still have an orgasm?

After an SCI, your experience of an orgasm may be different. Your erogenous zones (areas of your body that respond to sexual thoughts and touch) may change. You may need to explore your body to find out what gives you pleasure.

How do I manage bladder and/or bowel issues during sex?

Follow a bowel and bladder schedule that works for your injury. Your rehab team will help you make a routine that is right for you. Having a routine will make you more confident during sex and social settings.

Am I still able to have children?

- **Yes.** In general, an SCI does not affect your ability to get pregnant. There are some things to think about before and during pregnancy. We recommend having a maternal-fetal specialist follow your pregnancy. Talk with your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) for more information.
- You are still able to make sperm, even though your ability to ejaculate (eject semen from the penis) may be lower. Ask your primary health care provider for more information about sperm retrieval (getting sperm from your body) options.

How do I talk about sex and intimacy with my partner?

- It is important to be open and honest about what you need and want. Talk with your partner about your physical abilities, positioning, and areas of your body that respond to sexual pleasure.
- Ask other people with spinal cord injuries or your rehab team for tips and advice.

Online resources

Spinal Cord Injury Sexual Health

- Information about sexuality and sexual health after an SCI from Spinal Cord Injury BC
 - › <https://scisexualhealth.ca>

Sexuality After SCI

- A series of videos with information about different topics and questions you may have about sexuality after an SCI
 - › www.sexualitysci.org

Sexuality and Reproductive Health in Adults with Spinal Cord Injury: What You Should Know

- A pamphlet with information about sexual health after an SCI

- › <https://pva.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/sexuality-consumer-cpg-2012.pdf>



PleasureAble: Sexual Device Manual for Persons with Disabilities

- A pamphlet with information about different sexual devices and how to use them

- › <https://sci-bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PleasureABLE-Sexual-Device-Manual-for-PWD.pdf>



Sex and Paralysis Videos

- Videos about positions and ways to have sex with an SCI
 - › www.drmitchelltepper.com/sex_and_paralysis_video_series



Resources in Nova Scotia

Venus Envy

1727 Barrington Street
Halifax, NS

- A store where you can buy sexual devices and books about sex, sexuality, and gender. Staff can help you learn about sexual health and disability, and sexual devices and aids.
 - › www.venusenvy.ca

Sexual Health Nova Scotia

- A list of sexual health centres throughout the province
 - › www.shns.ca/member-centres

IWK Urogynecology/General Gynecology Program

- This program is for people with vaginas who have bladder and/or pelvic floor problems. You will need a referral from your primary health care provider.
 - › Phone: 902-470-6755

Urology patient consultations

Halifax Professional Centre

5991 Spring Garden Road – Suite 620

Halifax, NS

- You will need a referral from your primary health care provider.
 - › Phone: 902-425-3940

Male Infertility and Andrology Clinic

- You will need a referral from your primary health care provider.
 - › Phone: 902-425-3940

IWK Perinatal Clinics

- These clinics offer counselling pre-conception (before you get pregnant) with maternal-fetal medicine specialists (doctors who specialize in birthing parent and fetal health before, during, and shortly after pregnancy).
- You will need a referral from your primary health care provider.
 - › Phone: 902-470-8365

Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia

- This tool helps you find a local psychologist:
 - › www.apns.ca/find-a-psychologist

Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association

- Pelvic health physiotherapy
 - › www.physiotherapyns.ca/find-a-physio

Accessible pelvic health physiotherapy clinics

- The Pelvic Health Clinic by Erika Burger Physiotherapy has a ramp for wheelchair or stroller access.
 - › www.thepelvichealthclinic.ca
 - › Phone: 902-229-8979
- Lifemark Sport Medicine – Canada Games Centre
 - › www.lifemark.ca/Canada-Games-Centre
 - › Phone: 902-404-3888
- Windsor Physiotherapy Ltd.
 - › www.windsorphysio.ca
 - › Phone: 902-798-0026

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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