Spinal Cord Injury Education

Sexual Function After Spinal Cord Injury
Normal Sexual Arousal

Men and women normally are sexually aroused in two different ways.

Psychogenic arousal begins with sexual thoughts, or seeing or hearing something sexually stimulating
  • In men the response to this arousal is erection. In women, the response is lubrication and swelling in the vagina

Reflexive arousal occurs because of direct stimulation to genitals or other areas
  • Response is the same, erection for men and lubrication/swelling for women
Level and Type of Injury Affects Sexual Function

- Men with incomplete injuries are more likely to experience psychogenic erections than men with complete injuries.
- Men with lower level injuries are more likely to experience psychogenic erections.
- Most men are able to have a reflex erection with direct stimulation if the S2-S4 nerves are intact.
- For women with SCI, function is related to lubrication. SCI may result in lack of, or insufficient lubrication.
Physical Issues to Consider

- Transfers
- Dressing and Undressing
- Level of function (paraplegia, tetraplegia)
- Range of motion especially at the hips
- Muscle tone (hypertonicity or hypotonicity)
- Endurance
- Balance
- Bowel and Bladder Continence
- Medications and Side Effects
- General hygiene
Ejaculation

- This is how semen is discharged from the penis
- The bladder is closed off so that semen flows past it
- After SCI, the bladder may stay open, and semen travels into the bladder
- Most men with complete injuries do not ejaculate. Men with incomplete injuries may ejaculate
Adaptive Devices and Medication to Enhance Sexual Function

- Vacuum pump
- Penile injection
- Transurethral therapy
- Viagra, Cialis
- Penile prostheses
Other Things to Think About Before Sexual Activity

• Autonomic Dysreflexia
• Bladder and Bowel management
• Location
  – Transfers
• Spasticity
• Birth Control
• STDs
Fertility and Reproduction

Male

• If ejaculation or any fluid is present during sexual activity, pregnancy is possible
• Birth control should be used unless pregnancy is intended
• Two common problems for men with SCI are inability to ejaculate and poor quality of semen
• Consult with a fertility specialist for questions regarding pregnancy
Female

- Women may not menstruate for several months after the initial injury
- Once menstruation resumes, fertility is what it was before injury
- Birth control should be used unless pregnancy is a goal
- Gynecologists should be consulted about special considerations related to pregnancy
- Complications include increased chance of blood clots, premature labor, UTI’s, and pressure ulcers
- Many women with SCI choose Caesarean delivery
Resources

• Sexuality, Fertility, & Parenting
  • http://depts.washington.edu/rehab/sci/forumreports.html#sexuality
• First Times
  – http://www.newmobility.com/reviewarticle.cfm?id=1253&action=browse
     NewMobility
• Yes You Can: Sexual Health and Reproduction. Paralyzed Veterans of America, 2009