

SPINAL INJURIES UNIT

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**OUTPATIENT
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**TRANSITIONAL
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Your Health – Keep it in Check



We all need to look after our health.

People with spinal cord injury can get any medical problem like the rest of the population – YOU need to make sure you continue all your normal health checks that anyone your age would be doing!

Having regular visits to your doctor is important. Finding the right doctor isn't always easy. Make sure they are someone you can talk to who also takes the time to carry out the medical checks that need to be done.

Here are some hints about some of the things you need to think about to keep healthy!

Your heart and circulation

- Your doctor is the best person to talk to about checking for any heart disease or blood pressure problems. You may have symptoms that you think are not related such as chest pain or shortness of breath.
- Get your cholesterol checked. You can then see what levels of 'good' cholesterol compared to 'bad' cholesterol you have. Changing your diet can then help
- Check for diabetes by having your blood sugar levels tested
- Limit alcohol intake and look at measures for smoking cessation
- If you have severe swelling in your feet, elevate them during the day. You may need special garments.

Your nutrition and weight

- Seeing a dietician is always useful so you can learn more about the right foods and they can help you with the right diet
- Think about whether you are underweight or overweight. This may lead you down a different path with your diet
- If you are under-weight you may need to have supplements
- Being overweight is more commonly a problem. Measuring your waist is a good way to check. Over 100cm in men and 80cm in women is seen as a higher risk for health problems
- Eating a well-balanced diet is important
 - A diet that is high in grains, fruit and vegetables is best
 - Protein such as in meat or eggs is important especially if you are trying to heal any skin breakdown
 - Try not to eat foods that are high in calories and saturated fats such as deep-fried foods or fatty takeaways
 - Cut down on adding salt to food
- Drinking large amounts of sugary drinks (soft drink, cordial) can lead to weight gain. Choose diet or low joule drinks to limit weight gain.
- Keeping a good energy balance is important. This means that what you eat is then balanced out with the energy that you burn through exercise or other physical activity. [Click here for information on Physical Activity](#)
- Give yourself time for shopping and preparing your meals
- Plan your budget to buy the 'good' foods



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Your bone health

- Bones below the level of your injury can become more fragile over time and have a risk of breaks or fractures. This means being careful when doing stretches or standing or in any manual handling by your carers.
- Its important to have calcium in your diet. Vitamin D assists with calcium absorption and bone health. Daily short periods of sun exposure help build Vitamin D. Your GP may also check your Vitamin D blood levels and recommend oral supplements if required.

Your lungs and breathing

- The higher the level of spinal cord injury means a greater risk of having problems with your breathing
- If you can give up smoking, that is a positive step. [Click here for information on It's all about Change](#)
- Do regular breathing exercises and make sure people around you know how to help you cough if needed
- Have a flu injection every year
- See your doctor earlier rather than later if you start feeling unwell

Your sleep

- Having a good night's sleep is really important
- Your breathing muscles relax during deep sleep and if they are weak, this may affect your sleep pattern and make you wake up continually during the night. This may make you tired during the day. It is worth talking to your doctor about this as they may be able to help.

Your stress levels

- Long term 'bad' stress can affect your health. It may make you feel overwhelmed with life and you may not be looking after your own health.
- Feeling 'run down' can impact on your immune system and may make you more prone to infections or skin problems
- Think about the things that cause you stress and look at ways that may make things better. You may need to get some help to work through these issues
- It's all about having a balanced lifestyle of family and friends, work, leisure and relaxation.

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