

A Basic Glossary for Spinal Cord Injuries

by [John Demas](#) on 10/20/10

No matter how you've [injured your spinal cord](#), you'll immediately want to know which paralysis or mobility issues you're likely to face in the future. The answers to your questions will largely depend upon: (1) the specific nature of your injury, (2) which parts of your spine were injured and (3) the types of rehabilitative therapies available to those with your kind of injuries.

A Basic Glossary for Spinal Cord Injuries (SCIs)

A. The [Four Regions of the Spine](#)

- The [cervical](#) portion of the spine. The neck vertebrae or top portions of the spine (up near the base of the skull) are frequently referenced as the seven cervical vertebrae. (Doctor often label these as C1-C7.)
- The 12 upper back or [thoracic](#) vertebrae (often labeled as T1-T12) are located just below the seven cervical vertebrae.
- Below the thoracic portion of the spine are the five [lumbar](#) vertebrae, often referred to as the "lower back" region of the spine. These spinal bones are commonly labeled as L1-L5.
- The [sacrum](#) and the [coccyx](#) are located at the base of the spine below the lumbar vertebrae. This bone group is fused together. (The coccyx is commonly referred to as the "[tailbone](#).") The sacrum, a "[shield-shaped bony structure](#)," is found at the bottom of the lumbar vertebrae. It's connected to the pelvis.

Other Key Spinal Column Terms

- Cartilage. The spaces between a healthy spinal column's vertebrae are cushioned by soft "**spongy pads**" of cartilage referred to as "intervertebral discs" that make a certain degree of flexibility in the back possible. Cartilage is basically made up of a "**fibrous connective tissue**." **Cartilage** is present in the adult outer ear structure, nose, various joints, windpipe and the larynx.
- **Central Nervous System**. This is part of the vertebrate nervous system is made up of the **brain** and spinal cord. (CNS).
- **A Complete Spinal Cord Injury**. If you have this type of SCI, you cannot feel or voluntarily move parts of your body below the spinal column injury level.
- An Incomplete Spinal Cord Injury. This type of SCI indicates that some degree of functioning remains below the level of your spinal cord injury.
- **Spinal Cord**. The 30 (or more) bones that make up the spinal column each have a rounded hole in the middle of them. When these vertebrae are stacked on top of each other, they create a protected space or channel for the spinal cord. All of the most critical signals from the brain to various parts of the body are sent via the spinal cord. For example, the spinal cord sends signals to various parts of the body so they'll know how to move. It also tells us how to perceive various body sensations. The spinal cord runs from the base of the brain down to right below the rib cage in most adults.
- Spinal nerves. These "nerves" or "roots" extend throughout the spinal cord and reach downward toward the lower back area and legs.
- Vertebrae. More than 30 bones or vertebrae are stacked on top of each other and form the spine or spinal column.

For more detailed information on spinal cord injuries, please visit the following [MedlinePlus Web page](#).

***Demas & Rosenthal** remains one of Sacramento's most highly respected and accomplished personal injury law firms. We've been successfully representing clients since our firm first opened its doors back in 1993. Every Demas & Rosenthal attorney takes great pride in obtaining the full compensation and complete justice owed to every client.*