

Sports and Spinal Cord Injury Patients

by [John Demas](#) on 12/08/10

Many [spinal cord injury](#) (SCI) patients return to playing sports once their health conditions improve. In addition to benefiting from the added exercise, they often become much more optimistic about their futures. When patients see themselves able to enjoy various sports and hobbies, they often realize that many other positive activities may keep opening up to them as their health situations improve.

Optional Sports for SCI Patients

Spinal cord injury patients can frequently play the same sports as the non-disabled by just making minor rule and equipment changes. In fact, some SCI patients currently take part in horseback riding, swimming, basketball, golf, tennis, skiing, hand cycling and hockey.

- **Basketball.** Recovering SCI patients began playing wheelchair basketball back before the first National Wheelchair Basketball Tournament was created in 1949. More than 50 years later, the National Wheelchair Basketball Association continues to grow and provide its teams with many different competitions.
- **Horseback Riding.** Many studies have documented how healing it can be for disabled people to ride horses. Spinal cord injury patients are among those who can definitely benefit from this activity that often instills a strong sense of self-confidence in those who pursue it. Interested SCI patients may want to contact the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association to learn more about therapeutic horseback riding opportunities in their own communities.
- **Tennis.** Although this sport requires considerable precision and physical flexibility, it's still a favorite among many spinal cord injury patients. The disabled usually abide by

the same rules as their more able-bodied peers, except that in wheelchair tennis, the ball can bounce twice before you hit it.

- **Swimming.** The weightlessness offered by water provides many benefits to those struggling with spinal cord injuries. For example, the pain that might otherwise bother an exercising SCI patient tends to be alleviated as that person performs various exercises in the water. Also, the water's resistance can help patients build their muscles without having to do any heavy lifting.
- **Skiing.** This sport surely appeals to the most coordinated and daring SCI patients. While wearing helmets like other skiers, these patients can stay safest by using devices like sit-skis (which resemble sleds). If SCI patients are unable to use their arms or maneuver the sit-skis by leaning one way or another, instructors can pull them across the snow. The more able-bodied SCI patients may want to balance themselves on mono-skis or bi-skis. Those seeking added information about this sport can contact the National Sports Center for the Disabled on the Internet.
- **Golf.** Once SCI patients have regained considerable upper-body strength and balance, they can start trying to play this sport while sitting in their wheelchairs. Disabled golfers now have special carts and equipment available to them that can help them compete on a more equal basis with their non-disabled peers.
- **Hand Cycling.** An SCI patient interested in this sport usually either attaches a "cycle" to the front of his (or her) manual wheelchair or uses a specially designed, three-wheeled "trike" (it's somewhat like a bicycle) with multiple gears. Athletes who become highly skilled in this sport can pursue it all the way to the Paralympics.
- **Hockey.** While this sport often brings action-packed games to mind, it doesn't always have to be played in a dangerous manner. Helmets and padded gear are among the most critical pieces of equipment. SCI and other disabled players usually play this sport while sitting on sleds, moving themselves forward by using two short hockey sticks. Like their non-disabled counterparts, SCI players must work hard to hit the pucks into the proper goal areas. Serious and accomplished players can pursue this sport all the way up to the Paralympics. We hope this information proves useful to all SCI patients trying to regain enough strength to pursue competitive (or pleasure) sports.

Contact Our Spinal Cord Injury Lawyers

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