

Know the Risks and Take Steps to Prevent Spinal Cord Injuries

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

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Spinal cord injuries can happen to anyone, and they are life-changing. The good news is, there are many steps you can take to reduce your risk. Knowing the main causes of neck and back injuries -- along with the symptoms, so you can get the proper diagnosis and treatment -- is the best way to keep yourself and your loved ones healthy and safe.

According to the Mayo Clinic, nearly 50 percent of all [spinal cord injuries](#) are caused by motor vehicle accidents. People who are 18-35 are most likely to sustain a spinal cord injury from motorcycle and car accidents.

Twenty-four percent are caused by falls. In fact, falls are the most common way for older people to sustain spinal trauma.

Injuries from acts of violence, particularly gunshot wounds, account for around 11 percent of spinal cord injuries, while sports-related accidents and injuries during other recreational activities result in 9 percent. Osteoporosis, arthritis, cancer and other diseases round out the list of top causes of these debilitating injuries.

Know the Symptoms of a Spinal Cord Injury

One of the peculiarities of injuries to the spine is that it is not always immediately clear -- to the victim, witness or doctor -- that one has occurred. Whenever there is even a possibility that the spine has been injured, it is essential that the person be kept completely still until paramedics arrive.

Depending on the type of the injury and its location on the neck or spine, spinal cord injuries may cause any of these symptoms:

- Severe pain and/or pressure
- Difficulty breathing
- Numbness and weakness
- Inability to move or to feel sensations such as cold, heat or touch
- Loss of normal bowel and bladder control
- Problems maintaining balance

Steps You Can Take to Reduce Your Risk of a Spinal Cord Injury

Buckle up. Whether you are the driver or a passenger, always wear a seat belt and make sure children are properly secured in a child safety seat. Put kids under 12 in the back seat.

Never drive drunk or ride with a drunk. Contrary to popular myth, the relaxing effects of alcohol do not protect drunk drivers from injury. In an accident, a drunk driver is even more likely to be injured than anyone else.

Wear proper sports safety gear. When playing sports like football, hockey or baseball, or when biking, skiing, horseback riding or riding a motorcycle, always wear a properly fitting helmet that has been safety rated for that activity.

Don't just dive in. Swimmers should make sure the water is deep enough for diving. Similarly, gymnasts should never perform jumps or flips without spotters.

Install child-proof safety gates and window guards. If you have children, keep them safe from falls by blocking off access to stairs and upstairs windows.

Take steps to prevent falls. Keep floors clear and wear non-slip shoes. Consider installing grab bars and non-slip bathmats in the bathroom. Secure stairway banisters and railings to make sure they can catch your fall.

Keep your home gun-safe. Keep any firearms unloaded and in a locked case, with the ammunition stored separately.

Related Resource:

["Spinal Cord Injury » Risk Factors and Causes, Prevention, Signs and Symptoms, Diagnosis"](#) (Healthcommunities.com, Neurology Channel)