

Glossary

These pages explain words that we use in your booklet.

Word	Explanation
Ankle - foot orthosis	AFO Brace supporting the forefoot and preventing plantar flexion or 'foot drop'.
Ambulation	A walking motion, often aided by braces and or crutches.
Ankylosis	Loss of mobility in a joint caused by bony deposits of calcium.
Ankylosing spondylosis	A degenerative disease of the spinal column, especially one leading to fusion and immobilisation of the vertebral bones.
Anoxia	A state of almost no oxygen delivery to a cell, resulting in low energy production and possible death of the cell.
Anticholinergic	A type of drug often prescribed to reduce spasms of smooth muscle, especially of the bladder.
Anticoagulants	A drug therapy used to prevent the formation of blood clots that can become lodged in cerebral arteries and cause strokes. Also used to treat blood clots in the leg or lung.

Word	Explanation
ASIA impairment scale	<p>This scale describes a person's functional impairment as a result of their spinal cord injury</p> <p>A = Complete. There is no movement or feeling in the lowest sacral segment</p> <p>B = Incomplete. There is feeling but no movement</p> <p>C = Can move more than half the main muscle groups below the level of injury. Muscles having poor to medium strength</p> <p>D = Can move more than half the main muscle groups below the level of injury. Muscles having medium to good strength</p> <p>E = Normal. There is full movement and feeling</p>
Ataxia	A problem of muscle co-ordination due not to weakness, rigidity, spasticity or sensory loss, but in-coordination of movement.
Atrophy	The decrease in muscle mass as a result, of a SCI, or a neurological lesion and prolonged immobilisation.
Autonomic Dysreflexia (AD) or (Autonomic hyperreflexia)	An exaggerated response by the nervous system to various stimuli below the level of injury in SCI lesions about T6. A potentially dangerous reaction (sweating, chills, high blood pressure, severe headache). Untreated AD can lead to a fit or even a stroke.

Word	Explanation
Axon	The nerve fibre or process that carries a nerve impulse from the nerve terminals in the body back to the nerve cell.
Brown-Sequard syndrome	An incomplete spinal cord injury wherein half of the cord has been damaged. There is spastic paralysis on the same side as the lesion and loss of pain or heat sensation on the opposite side of the lesion.
Catheter	A fine tube that can be inserted into the body e.g. a urinary catheter is inserted into the bladder.
Catheterisation	The process of inserting a catheter e.g. urinary catheterisation is the process of introducing a catheter into the bladder
Cauda Equina	The cauda equina carries nerves which control the bladder and bowel. This is at the end of the spinal cord.
Central cord Syndrome	Trauma to the centre part of the cord only, affects upper limbs more than lower limbs.
Cerebrospinal Fluid(CSF)	The circulating clear fluid that bathes the brain and spinal cord, protecting it from shock.
Cervical	The portion of the spinal cord in the neck area (C1 – C7).
Chronic	A condition that is continuous or persistent over an extended period of time, not easily or quickly resolved. The opposite of acute.

Word	Explanation
Clonus	Involuntary movement of rapidly alternating contraction and relaxation of a muscle.
Central Nervous System(CNS)	Nerve tissue within the brain and spinal cord.
Colostomy	A surgical procedure to facilitate emptying the bowel through the wall of the abdomen.
Complete injury	Generally, a spinal cord injury that cuts off all movement and feeling below the lesion site. (Also known as ASIA impairment Scale 'A').
Coccyx	Commonly referred to as tail bone. It is located at the bottom of the spinal column.
Cystography	An examination of the interior of the bladder. This involves injecting a radio opaque solution (dye) to allow x-ray images to taken.
Contracture	A joint that has stiffened to the point that it cannot be moved through its normal range.
Crede	Using the hands to push on the lower abdomen to express urine.
Cyst	A cavity that fills with fluid (See syringomyelia).
Cystogram	An x-ray of the bladder to show reflux (backward) flow of urine back up to the kidneys.

Word	Explanation
Cystoscopy	A direct examination of the bladder using a cystoscope (a small flexible tube) inserted in the urethra.
Decubitus ulcer	A skin sore caused by unrelieved pressure.
Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)	Reduced blood flow in the lower extremities after spinal cord injury; can lead to blood clots (DVT's) that can, in turn, lead to pulmonary embolism (blocked blood vessels in the lung that can be fatal). Treated with anticoagulant drugs and compression stockings.
Demyelination	The loss of nerve function due to the loss of nerve insulation called myelin. Common in multiple sclerosis and spinal cord injury.
Dermatome	Area of skin that is served by one spinal nerve.
Digital stimulation	A technique for manually or mechanically triggering a bowel movement.
Diuretic	Medicines or substances that cause the kidneys to excrete a larger volume of water from the body. For example, alcohol, coffee, tea, and camomile tea.
DREZ	Short for dorsal root entry zone procedure, a surgical method of pain treatment that precisely cuts nerves in the dorsal root of the spinal cord.

Word	Explanation
Dura Mater	The tough, outermost membrane surrounding the spinal cord and brain.
Dysphagia	Having trouble eating and swallowing. Requires a speech and language therapy assessment.
Dyssynergia	Failure of muscle co-ordination especially in the bladder.
Electro-ejaculation	A method of obtaining viable sperm from men who are unable to produce a sample by other means; this involves stimulating the seminal vesicles using an electrical probe in the rectum.
Electromyogram (EMG)	An examination that records the electrical stimulation of the muscular contractions and helps determine the origin of a motor deficiency.
Embolism	The abrupt obstruction of a blood vessel by a blood clot, an air bubble or any other foreign body (embolus) not normally found in the blood.
Excitotoxicity	Excessive release of neurotransmitters, causing damage to nerve and glia cells.
Flaccidity	The absence or decrease in muscle tone.
Functional electrical stimulation(FES)	Application of low-voltage currents to enhance the function of paralysed muscles.

Word	Explanation
Foley catheter	A type of bladder drainage system that remains inserted in the bladder and drains to a storage bag.
Freidrich's Ataxia	An inherited, progressive dysfunction of the cerebellum, spinal cord and peripheral nerves.
Glia	Also called neuroglia; the supportive tissue of the nervous system, including the network of branched cells in the central nervous system (astrocytes, microglia, and oligodendrocytes) and the supporting cells of the peripheral nervous system (neurilemma and satellite cells).
Growth factors	Small proteins in the brain and spinal cord that are necessary for the development, function and survival of specific types of nerve cells.
Halo-vest	A device which allows traction of the cervical vertebrae (the neck) while immobilising it in the right position.
Harrington rods	Metal rods commonly placed under the skin along the spinal column for support after spinal cord injury.
Hemiparesis	Reversible weakness on one side of the body.
Hemiplegia	Paralysis on one side of the body.
Heterotopic ossification	Bone deposits around the hips and knees and other connective tissue.
Hydronephrosis	When the kidney is so full of urine that it is functionally impaired.

Word	Explanation
Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy	A system of delivering pressurised oxygen to help treat decompression sickness (the bends), smoke inhalation, air embolism and other conditions.
Hyperhydrosis	A condition characterised by abnormally increased sweating or perspiration.
Hypoxia	A decrease in the amount of oxygen found in the blood and subsequent level of oxygen in the tissue caused by hypoventilation and reduced cardiac output.
Incontinence	The involuntary elimination of urine or faeces.
Ileostomy	A surgical procedure that opens the ileum (small intestine) to facilitate removal of faecal material through the abdomen.
Incomplete injury	Generally, a spinal cord injury with preserved sensory or motor function below the lesion level. (ASIA Impairment scale B, C, D).
Indwelling catheter	A flexible tube that is left in the bladder and used to empty the bladder on a regular schedule; used for self catheterisation.

Word	Explanation
Ischial	That part of the iliac bone which is located beneath and behind the pelvis, under the buttocks.
Kidney-Ureter-Bladder (KUB) Radiography	Abdominal X-rays of the abdomen to detect abnormalities such as kidney stone, tumours or other obstructions.
Laminectomy	An operation to relieve pressure on the spinal cord.
Laryngotomy	An operation which consist of making an incision in the larynx. It allows intubation to ensure respiration by mechanical means.
Lesion	The site of injury or wound to the spinal cord.
Lower motor neurons	Nerve fibres that originate in the spinal cord and travel out of the central nervous system to the muscles. An injury to these nerves can affect muscle, bowel, bladder and sexual functions.
Lumbar	The thickest section of the spine; the lower back below the thoracic area.
Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)	More precise than computed tomography (CT scanning), MRI scanning consists of placing a person within a cylinder that produces a strong magnetic field. This examination allows the reconstruction of images of body layers using a computer. You cannot have a MRI if you have a pacemaker.

Word	Explanation
Methylprednisolone	A steroid given to people with spinal cord trauma within eight hours of injury, a neuroprotective that may help increase the chances of functional recovery.
Mitrofanoff procedure	This operation creates a conduit in the navel or lower abdomen connecting the bladder to a stoma, allowing intermittent catheterisation for quadriplegics and women who have trouble accessing their urethra.
Motor neuron	A nerve cell that carries information from the central nervous system to the muscles.
Myelin	White, fatty insulating material on nerve cells that helps rapid conduction of nerve impulses. Loss of myelin accompanies MS, spinal cord injury and other neurological conditions.
Necrosis	A form of cell death resulting from anoxia trauma or any other form of irreversible damage to the cell; involves the release of toxic cellular material into the intercellular space, poisoning surrounding cells.
Neuron	The main cell of the brain and nervous system.
Neurogenic Bladder	A lack of bladder control due to a brain, spinal cord, or nerve condition.

Word	Explanation
Neuroprosthesis	An implanted functional electrical stimulation device that allows paralysed people to do things such as breathe off a ventilator, grasp a key, stand for a transfer, empty the bladder.
Occupational therapy	The process by which people with paralysis are taught to maximise their independence in the real world by use of assistive technology, management of daily living activities and maintenance of health.
Oedema	An excessive accumulation of fluid in tissue spaces or a body cavity.
Orthosis	An external device that supports the body and limbs or assists motion. For example, glasses, crutches, wheelchair.
Orthostatic hypotension	Pooling of blood in the lower extremities: combined with lowered blood pressure in people with spinal cord injury, results in light-headedness, numbness and or pallor.
Osteomyelitis	Infection of underlying bone, often related to decubitus ulcers.
Osteoporosis	Loss of bone material, common after paralysis and inactivity.
Ostomy	An opening in the body to drain the bladder (cystostomy), to remove solid waste (colostomy or ileostomy) or allow passage of air (tracheostomy).

Word	Explanation
Paralysis	Injury or disease to a person's nervous system can affect the ability to move or feel: this reduced motor or sensory ability is called paralysis.
Paraplegia	Loss of function and paralysis in the legs which translates as a loss of strength.
Percussion	A series of rapid, sharp taps against the abdominal wall at the level of the bladder using the inside edge of the open hand, in an effort to stimulate urination.
Peripheral Nervous System (PNS)	Nerves in the body away from the brain and spinal cord: they have the ability to self-repair that the central nervous system nerves do not.
Peristalsis	Rhythmic muscular contractions of the digestive tract.
Phrenic nerve stimulation	Application of an electrical signal to the phrenic nerve in the neck or the chest, which controls the diaphragm and therefore breathing.
Physical therapy	The process of regaining maximum body function and physical abilities.
Prognosis	Prediction or forecast regarding the course of a disease.

Word	Explanation
Postural hypotension	Reduced muscle and blood vessel activity in the lower extremities, which causes blood to pool in the legs of people who are paralysed. Reduced blood pressure can cause light headedness. Wearing elastic stockings, or an abdominal binder is recommended.
Pressure sore	A skin breakdown due to unrelieved pressure.
Priapism	An erection that last for several hours or more, a dangerous side effect of certain drugs that improve erectile dysfunction.
Prosthesis	An appliance or device used to replace a limb, a part of an amputated limb, or an organ that is severely damaged or destroyed.
Quadriplegia	Also known as tetraplegia; paralysis affecting all four limbs.
Range of motion	Normal movement of a joint, typically restricted by injury.
Reflux	Back flow of a liquid against its normal direction.
Regeneration	The re- growth and reconnection of damaged nerves. The process of repair occurs naturally in the peripheral nervous system, but not in the central nervous system (brain or spinal cord). Functional regeneration remains a very difficult problem.

Word	Explanation
Rehabilitation	A set of services to restore maximum function; physical, psychological, vocational and social – to a person with a disability.
Reciprocating Gait Orthosis (RGO)	This is a leg and waist brace system that allows paraplegics to stand and to swing their legs in a gait pattern; require less energy than other types of braces.
Rhizotomy	The cutting of nerves to interrupt spasticity or pain signals.
Secondary conditions	A primary condition is a medical diagnosis: spina bifida, spinal cord injury, etc. A secondary condition is any medical, social, emotional, mental, family or community problem that a person with a primary condition may experience, such as pressure sores, pain, depression, reduced social life, lack of gainful work, etc.
Secondary injury	A cascade of chemical activities following trauma to the brain or spinal cord that contribute to the damage. Included is swelling, loss of blood flow, release of free radicals, excitotoxic amino acid release.
Sialorrhea	The term for excessive salivation and drooling.
Shear	The friction on tissues caused by dragging across a surface can cause skin to break down.

Word	Explanation
Spasticity	Uncontrolled muscle activity. This condition can be beneficial for muscle tone but can interfere with every day activities.
Sphincterotomy	A surgical procedure to relax the urethral sphincter, thus improving bladder function. An alternative is the placement of a stent, which is reversible. Botulinium toxin (Botox A) has also been used to relax the sphincter.
Spina bifida	Congenital spinal cord dysfunction due to malformed neural tube during prenatal development.
Spinal shock	After the initial spinal trauma, this condition, similar to a coma from a brain concussion occurs; the nervous system shuts down and the body become flaccid. Can last for three or four weeks.
Stoma	(Greek word meaning mouth) A surgically created opening from the skin to the deep viscera (internal organs) for the purpose of collecting the contents.
Stroke	A 'brain attack' (Cerebrovascular accident – CVA) leading to the loss of brain tissue' caused by bursting (haemorrhagic) or blocked (ischemic) blood vessels in the brain.
Suprapubic cystoscopy	An opening through the abdomen to drain the bladder with a catheter, known as a 'super tube'.

Word	Explanation
Sympathetic nervous system	A subset of the autonomic (involuntary) nervous system that accelerates heart rate, constricts blood vessels and boosts blood pressure.
Syringomyelia	A disorder caused by formation of a fluid-filled cavity (syrinx) within the spinal cord.
Syrinx	A cavity in the spinal cord that fills with fluid.
Tendon transfer	A type of hand surgery that offers certain quadriplegics significant increase in hand function. Takes advantage of functioning muscles in the arms by moving the tendons that control the hands.
Tenodesis	This involves stabilizing a joint by anchoring the tendons that move the joint.
Tetraplegia	Paralysis affecting all four limbs. Also known as quadriplegia.
Thoracic	The portion of the spinal column in the chest, between the cervical and thoracic areas.
Thrombosis	The medical term for a blood clot.
Tracheostomy	An opening in the neck at the front of the windpipe to help breathing.
Transverse myelitis	Inflammation in the spinal cord interfering with nerve function below the level of the inflammation. An acute attack of inflammatory demyelination.

Word	Explanation
Upper Motor Neurons	These are the long nerve cells that originate in the brain and travel through the spinal cord. Disruption of these cells leads to paralysis, although some reflex is still possible.
Ureter	The canal that conducts urine from the kidney to the bladder.
Urethra	The canal that leaves the bladder and ends outside the body which urine passes through to be excreted.
Urinary calculus	Solidification of mineral salts in the urine. A stone can block the kidney, the ureters or a catheter and its elimination through the natural pathways may irritate the bladder and cause bleeding of the bladder lining. Calculi are caused by urinary infections, an overly strong concentration of urine due to low fluid intake and the use of indwelling (permanent) catheters. Urinary infection has a tendency to make the urine alkaline, which leads to a precipitation of the calcium contained in the urine. Infection and urinary calculi almost always go hand in hand.
Urinary Stenosis	Pathological shrinking of a urinary orifice or canal.
Vertebrae	Each of the bones that form the spinal column.
Vesico-Spinal	Relating to the urinary bladder and spinal cord.

Word	Explanation
Vital capacity	The maximum volume of air that can be expelled from the lungs on forced expiration, following maximum inspiration. It is measured using a spirometer.
Warfarin	A commonly used anticoagulant, also known as Coumarin.
Weaning	The gradual removal of mechanical ventilation as a person's lungs gain strength.
White Matter	The outer portion of the spinal cord containing nerve tracts that are covered by myelin.

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