Pregnancy and Childbirth in Women with Spinal Cord Injury

FERTILITY AND BIRTH CONTROL

For more information, please go to:
www.sci-pregnancy.org

• **Doctor**
  Look for a doctor who has a background in SCI or is willing to learn. Also speak to your doctor about the types of therapy you are doing and discuss how safe he or she feels they are in addition to equipment needs or changes.

• **Physical/ Occupational Therapist**
  Also discuss your plans for pregnancy with your therapist. If you are engaged in a workout routine on your own, discuss it with your doctor as well.

• **Medication**
  You should also discuss your medications with your doctor if you are trying to conceive a child. He or can help you decide if you should stop them or start to taper them off at this time. (Bring a copy of our SCI Medication Safety pamphlet to discuss with your doctor.)

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Resources:

Disclaimer
This pamphlet only provides general information. It is for informational and educational purposes only and should not be used to diagnose or treat a medical condition. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice relative to your specific medical conditions. Always seek the advice of your doctor or other qualified health provider before starting any new treatment or with any questions you may have about your personal health.
Menstruation:
For the first 6 months after an SCI, some women lose their menstrual cycles (periods) but for other women, menstruation remains pretty much the same as it was prior to injury. When your period returns, bleeding should last as long as it did before you were injured. Some women with SCI, however, particularly those whose injury is at the level of T6 or above, experience intensified premenstrual and menstrual symptoms resembling those of autonomic dysreflexia (sweating, headaches, etc.).

Fertility:
Once your periods return post-injury, your reproductive function will be what it was before you were injured. This is because female fertility, unlike male fertility, is a result of hormonal balances rather than neurological function.

Birth Control:
Because female fertility remains unaltered after SCI, birth control is necessary for preventing pregnancy. You should investigate all of your options before choosing what is right for you. Make sure you are fully informed before making a decision about birth control.

Below are experiences and perceptions shared by a focus group of women with SCI:
• “Condoms were the only option that was ever presented to me.”
Condoms are a valid option, but there may be something else that fits better with your lifestyle.
• “I didn’t even consider birth control. [I thought] I wasn’t going to get pregnant.”
The woman who shared this, now has a lovely teen-aged daughter!
• “I had an IUD before my injury and used a diaphragm after my injury.”
A diaphragm may, however, present difficulty for those with little hand dexterity.

Planning your Pregnancy:
• Prenatal Vitamins
You can never start prenatal care early enough! Your health will affect the health of your baby. If you are planning a pregnancy, it is important to take good care of yourself and take a good prenatal vitamin that is recommended by your doctor.

• Nutrition and Exercise
Try to get good nutrition and get in shape. Having a baby takes a lot out of you, but you can prepare physically as well as emotionally for pregnancy, delivery and caring for your baby.

• The birth control pill may present a risk of blood clots. Some say a lower dose will reduce the risk of blood clots, but it is not known how low a dose is still effective. A blood clot is a dangerous possibility and should be discussed with your doctor.
  o “I had no idea about clots!”