

Transitioning to Independence



You know firsthand the bladder and bowel complications that can come with a spinal cord injury (SCI). In rehab, you received education and practical solutions along with therapy and training. Now as you set on the path to living more independently, it's important to have clear information and options.

Spinal Cord Injury Ontario can help you transition to a life of freedom and choice. Our professional staff offer customized services and support, and are here to help when you need us.

Visit us at **[sciontario.org](https://www.sciontario.org)** or contact us at 416-422-5644, ext. 330 for more information and to connect with services. For now, we offer this brief guide on issues related to bladder and bowel management.

What's Your Story?

You may share bladder and bowel difficulties with others who have sustained an SCI, but every person has their own story, which is much bigger than their injury. Your care needs will depend on your age, level of activity, education and employment goals, relationship status, passions and desires. And any of these can suddenly change. There is no one-size-fits-all life.

As you read through the information in this booklet, keep in mind what is uniquely you. Right now, heading home may be a big challenge in itself. What about your vision for the future? Will you be mainly in your home – perhaps raising children, studying online or starting a business? Or are you eager to be out in the workplace or classroom? Your support needs are very much related to your life plans and, with a strong team around you and workable solutions, you can ease your fears and build confidence in every area of your life. It's not hard to see evidence of this in the many people with an SCI who live full and active lives.

Health Issues

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are one of the most common issues after a spinal cord injury. A UTI happens when bacteria enters your bladder and multiplies. If not treated, the infection can spread to your kidneys and further. With bowel care, the most common health issues are constipation or diarrhea. All of these bladder and bowel issues can be managed with different approaches.

Less common but very serious is the possibility of developing autonomic dysreflexia (AD), which leads to acute hypertension (high blood pressure). Stimulation or irritation below the level of injury – such as from a full bladder, a UTI, constipation or excessive digital stimulation – can trigger a sympathetic response in the nervous system, leading to a high heart rate and high blood pressure. This is considered an emergency situation and requires immediate response.

Bladder and Bowel Solutions

While you'll be leaving rehab with a protocol for your bladder and bowel care, it's important to know that you have choices. You may use the same protocol and switch products or provider. Or you may want to change both your protocol and your products. Be sure to work with your health care team to clarify your options and determine what's right for you.

BLADDER

Intermittent catheterization works for men and women. A catheter is inserted into the bladder every 3 to 6 hours for a total of between 4 to 6 times per day. Generally, this is scheduled using a timer and you empty your bladder into a toilet or other container. There are many different types, sizes and costs of catheters on the market.

Foley catheters also work for men and women. A Foley catheter is indwelling, meaning it is inserted into the bladder and stays in position for up to 4 weeks. This is generally not a long-term solution, as there are associated risks, but it can be an option in some cases. A Foley catheter is inserted by a doctor or nurse.

Condom catheters are only for men. They are made of a condom attached to a drainage bag and carry a lower risk of infection than a catheter inserted into the bladder. However, the skin might react to the adhesive used to hold the condom in place. Condom catheters are single-use and designed to be changed every 24 hours.

A supra pubic catheter involves a surgical procedure. A catheter is inserted into the bladder through an incision in the abdomen, a few inches below the navel. Urine can either drain from the catheter into a bag or be stored in the bladder and emptied periodically through a valve at the end of the catheter.

The Mitrofanoff procedure is considered major surgery. A Mitrofanoff is a small channel that connects the bladder to the outside of the body. The channel is made from a piece of the appendix or small bowel, and the opening is often placed in the belly button. The bladder is emptied by inserting a catheter through the one-way flap valve.

An Ongoing Resource

Visit us at sciontario.org for info and support on issues relating to spinal cord injury.

BOWEL

Digital stimulation involves inserting a finger into the rectum. Gently touching or stimulating the wall of the rectum can help trigger a bowel movement. You can use this technique to train your bowel to empty at specific times, which can help prevent accidents and constipation. Sometimes, using a suppository as well is helpful.

Stool softeners and laxatives may be used to regulate your bowel and, once you understand the product, can be used on a schedule to help time your bowel movement. While it is not ideal to become dependent on a laxative, you can work with your health team to find the right combination and dose for your needs, either temporarily or on a long-term basis.

Diet is a great tool for bowel care. Learning what to eat to ease or prevent constipation (such as insoluble fibre) or for a loose stool (such as soluble fibre) can give you some control over your bowel. In either case, it's important to drink lots of water (about 10 eight-ounce glasses of water per day) to aid in bowel evacuation. It's also important to explore **exercise** as a tool to prevent constipation.

Bowel irrigation is a more invasive option if more moderate solutions are not working. Irrigation systems introduce water into the bowel using a rectal catheter. The procedure is performed on the toilet daily or every other day. There are various systems available on the market.

An ileostomy is an invasive option which requires surgery. In this procedure, a piece of the ileum (small intestine) is diverted to an artificial opening in the abdominal wall. You would then use ostomy appliances, including a pouch, for the collection of waste.

Costs

All of the systems and appliances outlined in this booklet are available from many manufacturers and vendors at a wide range of costs. Something as simple as a single catheter, for example, which is intended for one-time use, could range in price from less than a dollar to several dollars each. It is worth your while to compare vendor prices and options to find the best choice for your lifestyle.

If you are in a low income situation, you may be eligible for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). If so, you and your family members could receive monthly financial assistance for living expenses and benefits, like catheters and other bowel care supplies, drug coverage and vision care. Funding support is also available through most employee extended health benefit programs.

You Got This

It's common to be overwhelmed about transitioning to an independent life, but keep in mind that the right bladder and bowel care system exists for you. It may take some trial and error over a period of months with the help of your team, but you will get there. In time, gaining a sense of confidence and control will allow you to move forward in life and pursue your goals, whatever they may be. You will always need extra preparation and care, but you can still take charge of your life and choose your lifestyle.

Bladder and Bowel Support Systems

Each vendor offers a variety of supplies at varying costs. *This is an overview of some Ontario vendors, and is not meant to be a complete list, nor a recommendation from Spinal Cord Injury Ontario.*

ONLINE VENDORS

Bard/BD

www.bardmedical.com

Catheters Plus

www.cathetersplus.com

Coloplast

www.coloplast.ca

Healthwick

www.healthwick.ca

Hollister

www.hollister.ca

LESLAM Company Limited

www.leslam.com

Payless Medical

paylessmedical.ca

SCI Supply Inc.

www.scisupply.ca

WHYP Inc.

www.whyp.com

COMMUNITY VENDORS

Action Mobility

249 Edinburgh Road, Guelph

519-767-1300

www.actionmobility.org

Bayshore Pharmacy

River Road, Kitchener

519-748-2771

Capital Home Medical Equipment

2194 Robertson Road, Unit 27A, Nepean

613-721-2733, 1-877-537-3287

www.capitalhme.ca

Health Gear Medical and Safety

262 Queen Street East, Sault Ste. Marie

705-949-4327

www.healthgearmedical.com

Muskoka North Health Care Supplies

253 Stephenson Road, Unit 12E, Utterson

705-787-8009

National Home Health

148 Weber Street, Kitchener

519-578-3188

www.nationalhomehealthcare.ca

Ontario Home Health

Delhi Street, Guelph

519-821-9519

ont-home-health.on.ca

Ontario Medical Supply

1100 Algoma Road, Ottawa

613-244-8620

www.oms.ca

Preston Pharmacy

125 Waterloo Street, Cambridge

519-653-1994

www.prestonmed.ca

Robinson's Pharmacy Group

1276 Lasalle Boulevard, Sudbury

705-566-5592

www.robinsonsptharmasave.ca

Royal City Pharmacy

84 Gordon Street, Guelph

519-763-8975

www.royalcitypharmacy.com

Shoppers Home Health Care

Available in many Ontario communities

www.shoppershomehealthcare.ca

Yurek Pharmacy and Home Healthcare Ltd.

519 Talbot Street, St. Thomas

519-631-3330, 1-866-631-3330

yurek@yurekpharmacy.com

We deliver and champion excellence in service, support and advocacy for people with spinal cord injuries.

We have a vision: People with spinal cord injuries living the life they choose in a fully inclusive Ontario.

Questions? We're here to help and look forward to connecting.

Feedback? We'd love to hear if you've found this booklet helpful.
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