

PAIN & DISABILITYSM

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Spinal Trauma - GENERAL

Definition:

Damage to the spinal cord that results from injury.

Spinal cord trauma is caused by motor vehicle accidents, falls, sports injuries (particularly diving into shallow water), industrial accidents, gunshot wounds, assault, and other injuries. A seemingly minor injury can cause spinal cord trauma if the spine is weakened (such as from rheumatoid arthritis or osteoporosis).

A mild injury (such as "whiplash") may resolve when swelling is reduced. Severe injury (such as occurs from fractures, dislocations, or cutting of the spinal cord) usually results in permanent damage to the spinal cord. Spinal-cord trauma often causes permanent disability such as paralysis because nerve fibers are slow to heal and if they are destroyed, nerve fibers do not regenerate. Spinal-cord trauma can cause death in some cases.

Signs and tests:

Spinal-cord injury is a medical emergency requiring immediate attention to minimize the long-term effects.

1. A neurologic examination
2. Spine X-rays
3. A CT scan or MRI
4. A myelogram

Major Causes of Spinal Cord Trauma:

Diving into shallow water: Check the depth of water before diving and look for rocks or other possible obstructions.

Football and Sledding injuries often involve sharp blows or abnormal twisting and bending of the back or neck.

- Use caution when sledding and inspect the area for obstacles.
- Use appropriate techniques and equipment when playing football or other contact sports.

Falls while climbing at work or during recreation.

Defensive driving practices and improved vehicular design may prevent many automotive accidents and use of seat belts greatly reduces the risk of serious injury if there is an automobile accident.

