

# FACTSHEET

This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: [www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form](http://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form).

## Relationships, Sexuality, Fertility and Spinal Cord Injury

### Relationships

Meeting new people and trying new things will create opportunity for you to meet someone special. Remember, the more independent you are the easier it will be to start and maintain a relationship.

Relationships are complex and usually require time to develop. Always remember to keep yourself safe when meeting new people through social networking sites or dating websites. Finding a partner who you can trust, be comfortable with and explore your sexuality with will enhance not only your sexual experiences but many other aspects of your life.

Some people may not be ready for information about sex or may not want to openly discuss relationships or sexuality with parents or health professionals. There are lots of resources and information available when the time is right. It is important to ask questions to get the information when you are ready.

Remember sexuality is not just about sex. It includes all your sexual thoughts, feelings, beliefs, actions and values. A person's sexuality is very unique. Everyone gives and receives affection differently. It is important to explore your own sexuality in your own time when you are ready.

### Sexual Function and Spinal Cord Injury

You may experience additional challenges when becoming sexually active. These include:

- Confidence and self-esteem
- Lack of general knowledge about sexual activity
- Opportunity to meet others socially may be limited
- Lack of independence from parents or caregivers
- How to manage the bladder and bowel during sexual activity
- Men, getting and maintaining erections can be difficult, as can be positioning your body for sexual activity.

### Continence and Sexual function

Managing the bladder and bowel is very important for sexual function and good hygiene. Discuss any concerns you have about your continence with your doctor or nurse. Maintaining good continence for sexual function includes:

- Emptying your bladder and bowel before sexual activity.
- Talk openly with your partner about your concerns. This will help you feel prepared in the case of an accident.

### Positioning and Sexual function

Sexual positions that suit your individual needs should be explored. Take care with:

- Stomas and catheters
- Lower limbs
- Skin with decreased sensation.

There are helpful aides which may assist with positioning for satisfaction. You may like to discuss a stretching program with your physiotherapist to improve your flexibility.

## Fertility

Fertility and sexuality are two separate issues. Spinal Cord Injury does not impact a woman's ability to fall pregnant. Protection should be used to avoid unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Some men with Spinal Cord Injury can produce children without any medical help. Others may require assistance to father children depending on their ability to ejaculate. This can be explored in more detail with your doctor, and a referral to a fertility clinic will be required.

### Further information about sexuality and Spinal Cord Injury is available at:

- Spinal Cord Injury has a variety of resources about sexual function and erectile dysfunction that may be of interest. Fact sheets are available at: [www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/networks/spinal-cord-injury/resources](http://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/networks/spinal-cord-injury/resources).
- ParaQuad NSW has a series of factsheets including sexual function and fertility available online at [www.paraquad.org](http://www.paraquad.org).
- Information about the Intimate Rider can be found at: [www.intimaterider.com/sex-aid-for-the-disabled](http://www.intimaterider.com/sex-aid-for-the-disabled).
- General information on sexual health, relationships, and puberty can be found at [www.health.qld.gov.au/istaysafe](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/istaysafe)

### Video resources include:

- "Untold Desires" Stephens, Sarah. (Director)
- "Sexuality Reborn: Sexuality following Spinal Cord Injury" Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation. USA. 1993
- "Talking about sexual issues and Spinal Cord Injury: a guide for professional caregivers" BC Rehab 1990

### Remember:

- Practice good hygiene.
- There is information available about sexuality.
- Sexual curiosity is normal and sexual health is important.
- Be aware of sexually transmitted diseases, how to prevent them, and also prevention of unwanted pregnancy.