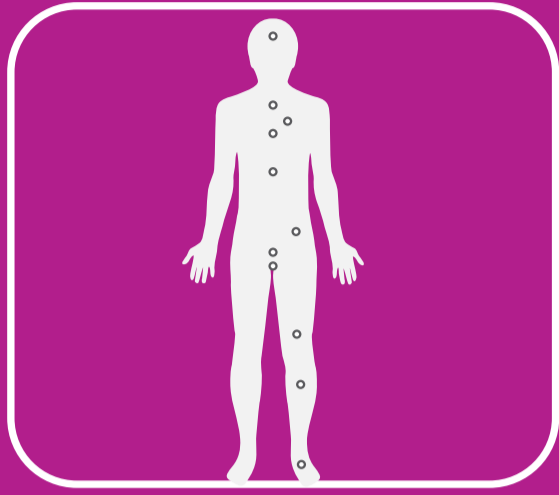


# Spinal Cord Injury ED Triage

Key information when individuals with existing spinal cord injury (SCI) present at ED:



## Pressure Injury

People with spinal cord injuries are at high to severe risk of pressure injuries due to likelihood of impaired mobility, sensation and circulation. These are likely to develop in the sacrum, heels, elbows and buttocks.

Pressure injury risk assessment (e.g. Braden Scale) must be done and emergency skin protection measures must be adopted.

### MANAGEMENT:

1. Immediately use special support surfaces to distribute weight and alleviate pressure points.
2. Change positions regularly (every 2 hours in bed, 15 minutes in wheelchair).
3. Conduct frequent visual checks for areas of skin irritation and breakdown.



[bit.ly/pressure-injury](https://bit.ly/pressure-injury)



## Autonomic Dysreflexia

AD is a life-threatening emergency where normal resting systolic BP exceeds 20–40mmHg above baseline. This is caused by a noxious stimulus below the level of SCI, and can lead to stroke or death.

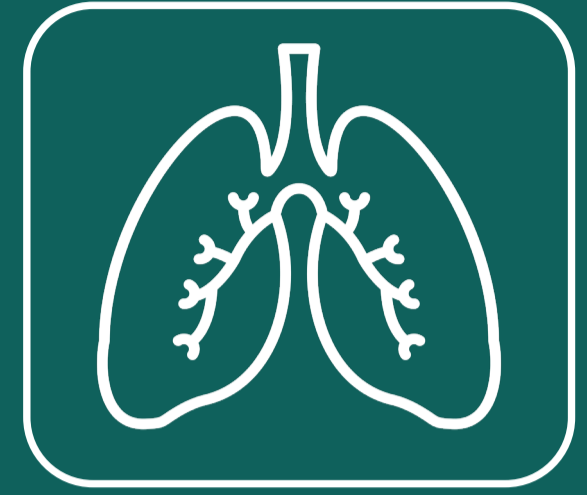
Individuals with SCI may have lower than average resting BP, it is important to know a person's nominal BP to diagnose AD. Common symptoms include decreased heart rate, headache, sweating/chills, anxiety/confusion and increased muscle spasticity.

### MANAGEMENT:

1. Sit person upright.
2. Take BP every 5 minutes until normal.
3. Check for source: loosen restrictive clothing, drain bladder, bowel obstructions, skin irritant/damage, fracture, ingrown toenail, etc.
4. If BP remains elevated, give antihypertensive agent (eg nitropaste, nifedipine).



[bit.ly/manage-ad](https://bit.ly/manage-ad)



## Respiratory

Individuals with SCI are at increased risk for respiratory compromise and failure due to denervation of diaphragm, intercostal and abdominal muscles. This also leads to high susceptibility of infection. High cervical injuries often require mechanical ventilation for survival.

Swallowing may also be impaired, close supervision of high cervical SCI when eating and drinking is required.

### MANAGEMENT:

1. Postural drainage, manual or mechanical assisted cough, or suction may be required to clear airways.
2. Bronchodilators can be used to improve respiratory function in SCI.



[bit.ly/manage-respiratory](https://bit.ly/manage-respiratory)