

CONDITION GUIDE

Spinal cord injury: a plain-English guide

For people with a spinal cord injury, and the families learning alongside them. What it is, what people ask, what helps at home, and how the NDIS and Kinship can support you.

The spinal unit taught you a new routine for your bladder, your bowel and your skin. Now you need people at home who will do it your way, every time. This guide is for you and the family learning alongside you.

A spinal cord injury happens when the spinal cord is damaged, blocking or impairing the nerve pathways between the brain and the body. How much movement, strength and sensation a person keeps depends on where the damage is and how severe it is (Spinal Life Australia).

Injuries can come from a fall, a car crash or sport. Spinal cord damage can also come from medical conditions such as multiple sclerosis, stroke or transverse myelitis. Damage in the upper back usually means paraplegia, affecting both legs. Damage in the neck can mean quadriplegia, affecting arms and legs.

Common effects include paralysis, pain, changes to bladder and bowel control, a higher risk of pressure sores, and changes in blood pressure. Spinal Life Australia's view is that with persistence, work and support, people regain independence and life finds a "new normal".

A note on words: we say "person with a spinal cord injury". Spinal Cord Injuries Australia was founded in 1967 by people with spinal cord injury, and most of its board live with one. Their lived-experience team is a good first call.

Key facts

- **20,000+** Australians live with a spinal cord injury
- **187** new traumatic spinal cord injuries in people 15+, in 2017–18
- **4 in 5** of those new injuries were in males
- **46%** were caused by land transport crashes, and 36% by falls



Figures: SpinalCure Australia (20,000+); AIHW, Spinal cord injury, Australia 2017–18 (national register data, published 2021).

What helps, day to day

- **A routine that works at home.** A routine planned with your health team, kept the same way every day, by people who know it. Free advice: National Continence Helpline, 1800 33 00 66.
- **Daily skin checks.** Pressure sores are a known risk after spinal cord damage (Spinal Life Australia). Your health team will show you what to check and how often.
- **Talk to someone who's lived it.** Spinal Cord Injuries Australia runs peer and family support, in spinal units and online. Call 1800 819 775.
- **Equipment and changes at home.** Assistive technology, equipment and home modifications are usually prescribed by a health professional, and the NDIS can fund disability-specific supports like these (NDIS).
- **Look after your mental health.** Adjusting takes time. SCIA offers mental health support, and Medicare Mental Health (1800 595 212) can help you find services.

How the NDIS can help

To be eligible for the NDIS you need to be younger than 65 when your application is received, an Australian citizen or permanent resident (or Protected Special Category visa holder) living in Australia, and have an impairment that's likely to be permanent and substantially reduces your ability to do everyday things.

Physical and neurological impairments are among the types the NDIS considers. If your injury came from a car accident or a public place and you're claiming compensation, tell the NDIS: you can still apply and still be a participant, but the NDIS can't fund supports already paid for by compensation (NDIS).

- 1 Connect with an NDIS partner (use the office finder at [ndis.gov.au](https://www.ndis.gov.au)) or call the NDIS on 1800 800 110.
- 2 Work with your treating health professional to gather evidence about your disability and how it affects daily life.
- 3 Complete your application with your NDIS partner, or by yourself using the access request form.
- 4 Submit it. Your NDIS partner can do this for you, or use the NDIS service hub, post it (NDIA, GPO Box 700, Canberra ACT 2601) or take it to a local office.
- 5 Wait for the decision. The NDIS tells you within 90 days once your application and all your evidence are in. You can ask for a review if you disagree.



The NDIS is changing. New NDIS laws passed in August 2026. From 1 October 2026, budgets for social and community participation and for daily living skills are being reduced as plans are reassessed or newly approved, and a new way of planning is due from April 2027. Check [ndis.gov.au](https://www.ndis.gov.au) for the latest.

How Kinship Uniting Services can help

We support people, not diagnoses. After a spinal cord injury, that means care done precisely the way your routine needs, by the same support worker every visit.

We understand. After a spinal cord injury, your bladder, bowel and skin routines matter, and they need to be done properly every time. Getting it wrong isn't a small inconvenience. It can mean pressure injuries, infections or a lost day.

Many people come home with a new body to learn and a family learning alongside them. You want support workers who follow your routine rather than inventing their own, and who get you out the door for work, sport and friends.

We're qualified. Kinship Uniting Services is a registered NDIS provider (4-GWVHCEY), operating in disability and aged care since 2017, and we've supported hundreds of clients and families. Our founder, Shazia Begum, has spent more than 15 years alongside people living with disability. Our registered high intensity supports include complex bowel care, catheter care and wound care. We're registered to deliver Supported Independent Living (SIL). The same support worker comes every visit, and families get updates as standard.

Here's how we can help.

- **Personal care and daily living.** Showering, dressing, meals and the running of the house, done the way your routine needs, at your pace. Daily living support
- **Bowel, catheter and wound care.** Complex bowel care, catheter care and wound care are on our registered high intensity list. High intensity support
- **Community participation.** Getting back out: sport, work, appointments, friends. Community participation
- **Supported Independent Living.** For people who need support at home day and night. We're registered to deliver SIL; call us to talk about current availability. Supported Independent Living
- **Private nursing and help at home.** Anyone can book privately, while funding is sorted or alongside it. For private nursing, send us an enquiry and we'll talk it through. For other services, call us for a quote. Private services
- **Respite for the family.** A familiar support worker spends time with you at home or out in the community, so your partner or family can rest, get to their own appointments or simply have the afternoon. NDIS-funded or booked privately. Respite care



Bladder and bowel care, done your way. Bladder and bowel changes are common after a spinal cord injury. For independent advice, the National Continence Helpline (1800 33 00 66) is free and staffed by nurse continence specialists. Our sister business, Equipit, supplies continence products such as adult nappies, continence briefs and bed protection (equipitdsp.com). Equipit is the product-supply arm of Kinship Uniting Services, an NDIS registered and CHSP approved provider since 2017. Please note: Equipit is part of the same family of businesses as Kinship, and you're free to buy continence products from any supplier you choose. Equipit is not an NDIS registered provider, so agency-managed NDIS funds can't be spent with Equipit. If you're self-managed or plan-managed, check with your plan manager first. More at kinshipunitingservices.com/continence-products.

For families, carers and referrers

For families and carers. Partners and parents often learn new care tasks fast. We keep you updated as standard, and respite with a familiar worker gives you time to be family again, not only carers.

For support coordinators and plan managers. If you're a discharge planner, support coordinator or plan manager, call us to talk through support at home after a spinal unit stay, including high intensity bowel, catheter and wound care. More at kinshipunitingservices.com/for-referrers.

Where to get help

- **Spinal Cord Injuries Australia:** 1800 819 775, scia.org.au (peer and family support)
- **Spinal Life Australia:** spinal.com.au
- **National Continence Helpline:** 1800 33 00 66
- **NDIS:** 1800 800 110
- **Medicare Mental Health:** 1800 595 212
- **Carer Gateway:** 1800 422 737
- **Kinship Uniting Services:** 0437 733 744 or 0424 756 143, info@kinshipunitingservices.com, 39 Victory Road, Colebee NSW 2761



Your checklist

- ☐ Get a written copy of your bladder, bowel and skin routines before discharge
- ☐ List the equipment you'll need at home, and who prescribed it
- ☐ Under 65? Start your NDIS application early (1800 800 110)
- ☐ Compensation or insurance claim? Tell the NDIS and keep the claim number handy
- ☐ Ask your health team who to call if something doesn't look right
- ☐ Book a call with SCIA peer support (1800 819 775)
- ☐ Brief your support workers on your routine, in your words

Questions people ask

Can you recover from a spinal cord injury?

It depends on the injury. How much movement and sensation a person keeps depends on where the cord was damaged and how severe the damage is (Spinal Life Australia). Your spinal unit team is the right place to ask about your own injury.

What's the difference between paraplegia and quadriplegia?

Paraplegia generally means paralysis of both legs, from damage in the thoracic (upper back) region. Quadriplegia comes from damage in the neck and affects the arms as well as the legs (Spinal Life Australia).

How does it affect the bladder and bowel?

Loss of bladder and bowel control is one of the common effects (Spinal Life Australia). Many people search for a "bowel program" or "bowel routine": a planned daily routine worked out with the health team.

What is life like after a spinal cord injury?

Different for everyone. Spinal Cord Injuries Australia's peer and family support team, people with lived experience, visit spinal units and run catch-ups in the community. Hearing from someone who has been there can help.

Is a spinal cord injury covered by the NDIS?

It can be, if you're under 65 when you apply and meet the other rules. If your injury involves a compensation claim, such as a car accident, you need to tell the NDIS. You can still apply (NDIS).

What causes most spinal cord injuries?

In the AIHW's 2017–18 national register data, land transport crashes caused 46% of new traumatic spinal cord injuries and falls caused 36%.



How do we get started with Kinship?

Call 0437 733 744, or send an enquiry through our website. We'll ask about the person first: what a good day looks like and what's getting harder. Then we'll tell you plainly whether and how we can help. If there's an NDIS plan, have it nearby. If there isn't one yet, we can still talk it through.

Ready to talk? We're here

If you'd like us to help with this, call 0437 733 744 and we'll talk it through. Tell us your routine and what matters to you. We'll tell you plainly whether and how we can help.

Call 0437 733 744 or 0424 756 143 · info@kinshipunitingservices.com · 39 Victory Road, Colebee NSW 2761 · kinshipunitingservices.com/get-support

Deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment? Contact us through the National Relay Service: Speak & Listen 1300 555 727, TTY 133 677, SMS relay 0423 677 767.

Sources

Spinal Life Australia: What is spinal cord damage?: <https://www.spinal.com.au/resources-for-you/what-is-spinal-cord-damage/>

AIHW: Spinal cord injury, Australia 2017–18:

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/injury/spinal-cord-injury-australia-2017-18/summary>

SpinalCure Australia: Spinal cord injury facts: <https://spinalcure.org.au/research/spinal-cord-injury-facts/>

Spinal Cord Injuries Australia (about SCIA): <https://scia.org.au/>

Spinal Cord Injuries Australia: Peer and family support:

<https://scia.org.au/living-with-a-disability/navigating-life-with-a-disability/>

Spinal Cord Injuries Australia: Contact us: <https://scia.org.au/contact-us/>

NDIS: What are the NDIS disability requirements:

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/applying/eligibility-requirements/what-are-ndis-disability-requirements>

NDIS: How to check your eligibility: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/applying/eligibility-requirements/how-check-your-eligibility>

NDIS: What is compensation: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/creating-plan/compensation/what-compensation>

NDIS: How to apply: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/applying/application-process/how-apply>

NDIS: Securing the NDIS for future generations (new NDIS laws):

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/ndis-laws/securing-ndis-future-generations>

NDIS: New way of planning: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/changes-ndis/new-way-planning>

Continence Health Australia: National Continence Helpline:

<https://www.continence.org.au/help-and-support/national-continence-helpline/>

Medicare Mental Health (national phone service 1800 595 212): <https://www.medicarementalhealth.gov.au/>