

Dysreflexia

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Your brain and body “talk” with each other by sending messages through your spinal cord. When you have had an injury to your spinal cord, the messages can’t get to your brain.

Your body responds by making your blood pressure rise which can lead to serious health problems. This is called dysreflexia.

Symptoms of Dysreflexia

You may have one or more of the following symptoms:

- increase in blood pressure
- pounding headache
- heavy sweating
- flushed or reddened skin
- blurry vision or seeing bright spots
- stuffy nose
- feeling anxious or jittery
- tightness in your chest, heart flutters or difficulty breathing.

Causes of Dysreflexia

Anything that can cause pain or discomfort below your spinal cord injury may cause dysreflexia. This includes:

- a full bladder
- constipation or a blockage in your small intestine

- tight clothing
- pressure ulcers (bedsores)
- bone injuries
- skin infections
- ingrown toenails
- bladder or kidney problems such as stones or infections
- pregnancy, labor or delivery.

Treating Dysreflexia

Try doing the following right away if you have symptoms of dysreflexia:

- Sit upright in a chair.
- Loosen tight clothing such as belts.
- Check your blood pressure (if you are able).
- Empty your bladder.
- Empty your bowel.
- Check your skin for bruises, cuts, pressure ulcers or other injuries.
- Take medicine as directed by your health care provider.

Call 911 or have someone take you to the nearest hospital Emergency Department if you have symptoms of dysreflexia that do not go away.

Diagnosing Dysreflexia

It is important to tell your health care provider about any symptoms you have, even if they go away.

Your health care provider may want you to schedule an appointment. He or she will take your medical history and give you a physical exam. You may need to have further testing done to determine the cause of your dysreflexia.

Preventing Dysreflexia

The best way to prevent dysreflexia is to empty your bladder regularly and to make sure you have regular bowel movements. It is also important to check your skin daily.

Make sure you have regular exams with your health care provider. He or she can help to keep your bladder and bowels healthy and prevent pressure ulcers.