

Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program - An Essential Recovery Path from Injury to Community Integration

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Introduction

Spinal cord is one of the critical components of the human body connecting brain to the rest of the body. Any Injury of the spinal cord can affect strength, sensation, balance and mobility. Severe spinal cord injuries are often sudden and unexpected leaving a devastating experience not just to the individual but to the entire family. Trauma, road traffic accidents, falls, infections are some of the common causes of spinal cord injuries. After immediate stabilization by medical or surgical interventions, comprehensive rehabilitation is must to bring the effected individuals closer to what they were earlier in terms of functional and emotional wellbeing.

Spinal Cord Injury rehabilitation is a specialized inpatient rehabilitation program designed and implemented by expert multidisciplinary rehabilitation team to address multiple requirements of the individuals effected by spinal cord injury.

Spinal cord carries nerves to and from the brain and is an extremely sensitive part of the human body that can result in temporary or permanent disability. Depending on the injury, there might be a requirement of medical or surgical intervention, but eventually should be followed up with personalized rehabilitation to bring back the best possible functional outcomes and overall quality of life.

Common Causes of Spinal Cord Injuries are

- Polytrauma and Road traffic accidents
- Falls

- Sports or activity injuries
- Certain diseases such as cancer, arthritis, osteoporosis and inflammation of the spinal cord.

Symptoms of spinal cord injuries

Common thing that you notice after a spinal cord injury is pain and reduced or no movement or sensation in some parts of the body.

- Severe pain at the injury site
- Weakness or Numbness in some portion of the body
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Difficulty with balance and walking
- Sometime Impaired breathing after injury
- Spasms.

In any case of suspected spinal cord injury, immediate attention is to be driven to medical and physical stability and ensure there is no further damage.

Primary objectives of spinal cord injury rehabilitation

- Achieve maximum possible strength, balance and mobility.
- Provide medical and nursing care and prevent complications
- Task specific training and adaptive techniques
- Improve overall physical, emotional, social wellbeing and integration back to the community.

Key components of spinal cord injury rehabilitation

Strength Training - physical, mental and social wellbeing, multi-disciplinary rehabilitation team, recovery goals, assessment and

rehabilitation tools. It is imperative to involve individual, family members and any key influencers that can positively impact recovery.

Choosing the right spinal cord rehabilitation program

Understanding the multiple requirements of spinal cord injury survivors, an ideal multidisciplinary rehabilitation team will include doctor, physiotherapist, an occupational therapist, nurse, dietitian, psychologist and recreational therapist to assist with the holistic wellbeing after injury.

Systematic approach to achieve personalized rehabilitation needs

It begins with base evaluation by respective multidisciplinary therapists and a personalized goal setting is arrived with realistic expectation setting of short term and long-term goals. Individual and family will play an active role in crafting the personalized care plan. As implementation begins, therapists will focus on maintenance and strengthening of muscle function, redeveloping fine motor skills, and learning adaptive techniques to accomplish ADLs (Activities of daily life). Education on dos and don'ts is an integral part throughout the recovery journey.

Few specific rehabilitation requirements that will demand rehabilitation expertise include pain management, wound care, prevent complications, assistive aides and any other support that requires critical attention.

There are multiple determinants of the duration and successful outcomes of spinal cord injury program. Level and severity of the injury, individual factors and motivation are few such critical determinants. Earlier the initiation of the rehabilitation program, better is the scope for overall physical, functional and overall quality of life.

After unexpected and sudden medical illness or injury, a struck point is common to decide on what is the immediate next step and where do they get the required support and guidance from. From everyday activities to professional and personal tasks, there is a requirement for someone being next to guide. Spinal Cord Injury can be one of the challenging conditions to deal with and that requires extremely good care and rehabilitation support. From preventing complications to maximizing physical functioning and reintegration into community, a structured rehabilitation programme is recommended path to recovery.

Different settings for spinal cord injury rehabilitation program

Rehabilitation programmes for spinal cord injuries can be of offered in multiple settings. An ideal institutional setting would be Inpatient Rehabilitation Facility. Institutional discipline, multi-disciplinary collaboration, state of the art equipment, care giver support, group activities and support groups for the patients make Inpatient Rehab Care an ideal choice for early and effective recovery. For any reason, if someone cannot be at inpatient rehabilitation center, there are options to manage rehabilitation at outpatient or Day Care centers. With challenges of travel increasing for variety of reasons, there is an option to get the therapy done at home with the therapist. Patient is comfortable because of familiar home environment. Coordination of multiple therapists if required, might be a challenge at home. Not all equipment can be arranged for rehabilitation at home. Addressing the emerging needs of time and travel, Digital rehab is an innovative approach to deliver rehabilitation care by remote methods. Digital rehab can overcome barriers of timely availability and travel restrictions. Leveraging the advantage of technology, digital rehab can provide an additional advantage of finding best of therapist beyond demographic location. Depending on the severity and duration of the injury, best possible recovery goals can be suggested by rehabilitation team. Reaching out to an expert rehabilitation therapist can be the first step to choose right spinal cord injury program that is the ideal for an early, effective and empowered recovery.

In summary, spinal cord injuries are mostly sudden and unexpected events that might be devastating not just to the effected individual but for immediate family and the community that they are part of. After immediate medical or surgical management, a comprehensive rehabilitation by multi-disciplinary team is essential to bring back the maximum possible functional independence and overall quality of life. Right setting and family support can make the complex task achievable by providing a systematic and supportive environment.