

## Types of spinal cord injury

### Clinical Negligence

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Spinal cord injury is damage to the spinal cord, which, depending on the severity of the damage, will result in varying levels of loss of function, such as mobility or feeling. In severe cases, the injury will result in paralysis of one or more limbs. Spinal cord injury can also affect bladder and bowel function, sexual functioning and fertility, respiration and control of blood pressure and body temperature.

Spinal cord injury is usually defined by reference to the level at which the injury occurred, either the cervical, thoracic or lumbar regions.

A spinal cord injury is further defined as complete or incomplete and this will depend on whether or not the injured person has any function below the level of the injury. If there is no function then the injury will be defined as complete. If some motor and/or sensory function remains then the injury will be defined as incomplete.

#### Tetraplegia (also referred to as quadriplegia)

Tetraplegics or quadriplegics suffer a loss of functioning in all four limbs and this usually occurs as a result of an injury to the cervical region of the spinal cord. A high level tetraplegic may need a ventilator.

#### Paraplegia

Paraplegics have usually suffered an injury to the lower part of the spinal cord and will generally suffer from loss of function to the lower limbs, bowels and associated organs only, although this can vary from person to person depending on the nature of the injury.

#### Cauda Equina Syndrome

This condition can cause paraplegia.

The cauda equina is a structure at the lower end of the spinal column consisting of nerve roots and rootlets. These nerves control movement of the lower limbs and the transmission of feelings. They also control the pelvic organs including sexual function.

Cauda equina syndrome occurs when there is a significant narrowing of the spinal canal causing compression of these nerve roots. There can be many causes of this narrowing. Examples can include disc rupture, tumour and infectious conditions. Signs of this condition can include severe lower back pain, sensory numbness in the perineal region, impaired urinary and bowel function and weakness or numbness in the lower limbs.

This condition is a medical emergency and requires urgent treatment. If treated early, a good recovery can be expected. However, if delay in treatment occurs, then the damage can be permanent.