

Research for Spinal Cord Injury



Like many people with a spinal cord injury (SCI), you may wonder if a cure to repair your spinal cord will be found in your lifetime. No one is sure when a cure will be found. But every day researchers study new ways to better understand SCI. They are using this knowledge to improve SCI treatments.

Focus of current research and new treatments

With SCI, damage isn't limited to nerves at the injury site. The injury sets off a complex reaction in the body. This can also damage nearby healthy nerves, blood vessels, and tissues. After the initial injury heals, scar tissue can form at the site. This may cause more damage to the nerves. It may stop them from growing again (regrowing or nerve regeneration). Because spinal cord injuries are so complex, finding a cure hasn't been easy. Current research suggests that a cure will likely involve not just one, but several treatments.

Research efforts have mainly been focused on these goals:

- Reducing damage to the spinal cord at the injury site
- Getting damaged nerve cells to regrow
- Improving rehabilitation methods to increase mobility and function
- Using brain-activated robots, artificial limbs, or exoskeletons to increase independence
- Improving treatments for certain health problems in the body

Treatments to test this research have involved some of the following:

- Using certain medicines to help reduce or prevent damage and scarring of the spinal cord shortly after injury
- Stimulating the body's own stem cells to repair and regenerate the damaged tissues
- Transplanting healthy nerve cells, Schwann cells, or stem cells at the injury site to promote nerve growth
- Using special technologies or devices to improve nerve and muscle control in the body
- Using new medicines, procedures, or surgery to treat health problems, such as pain, muscle spasms, and reduced bowel and bladder control

Clinical trials

New clinical trials and experiments for SCI are always being planned. You may hear about one of these and wonder if you should participate. If so, talk with your healthcare team. They can advise you on whether a certain trial or experiment is likely to benefit your health. They can also help you pass up unproven claims and risky programs.

To prepare for the future, live in the present

It's easy to focus on the possibility of a cure and forget about where you are today. Currently, there's no cure for SCI. So aim to live your life as fully as possible with the abilities you have now. That means making sure to:

- Keep your body as healthy as possible. Exercise regularly and eat healthy meals. Take care of your skin.

- Follow the plan that your healthcare team has set out for you.
- Work with your healthcare team to reach and maintain the highest level of function possible with current treatments for your level of SCI.

By staying as healthy as you can, you increase your chances of being able to take advantage of new treatments in the future, including steps toward a cure.

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