

Preventing Spinal Cord Injuries

Introduction

Every year, more than 10,000 Americans receive a spinal cord injury—many suffer permanent disability injuries or die. More than half the people who are so injured are young people—between the ages of 16 and 30. The most common causes of spinal cord injuries are motor vehicle accidents (38.5%), acts of violence (24.5%), falls (21.8%) and sports-related injuries (7.9%). In the last 20 years, the percentage of injuries due to car crashes and sports have been decreasing; however, those due to falls and acts of violence have been on the rise.

Topical Information

- **Motor Vehicles**
 - Always wear your seat belt—whether you're the driver or a passenger.
 - Be sure children are buckled in a child safety seat, booster seat or using a seat belt, depending on the age of the children.
- **Firearms**
 - Always keep guns and ammunition locked in a cabinet or a safe when they're not being used.
 - Keep guns and ammunition separate—do not store a loaded gun.
- **Prevent falls**
 - Use a stepladder that has a grab bar when you're reaching up to high shelves
 - Be sure all stairways have handrails.
 - If you have young children, put window guards on windows.
 - If you have young children, keep safety gates at both the top and bottom of stairways.
- **Sports safety**
 - Wear the appropriate safety gear for the sport you're playing.
 - Never use "head-first" moves, such as sliding head-first into a base in baseball, etc., or hitting your head on the boards in hockey.
 - Always use spotters in gymnastics—especially when you are working with difficult or new moves.
 - When diving in water, make sure the water is deep enough to prevent injury. If there is any doubt, don't dive!

Closing

In the United States alone, close to a quarter million people live with a spinal cord injury-related disability. Following the tips listed above may help you or someone you know prevent such an injury.