

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming in to or after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.

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Managing Stress and Anxiety within the Family after Spinal Cord Injury

Patient information leaflet

If you require a translation or an alternative format of this leaflet please call PALS on 01296 316042

Safe & compassionate care,

every time

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Useful Books and CDs for Teenagers and Children

'Supporting children when their parent has a spinal cord injury ' by the Dept of Clinical Psychology – this leaflet is available on every ward.

Audio CDL 'Indigo Teen Dreams: Teens Explore Relaxation / Stress Management While Receiving Guided Instructions on the Techniques of Breathing, Relaxation and Affirmations' by Lori Lite, 2005. www.Amazon.co.uk.

Audio CD: 'Enchanted Meditations for Kids' by Christine Kerr. Amazon.co.uk.

'Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook' by Martha Davis, Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman. Published by New Harbinger Publications, 2008. ISBN 978-1-57224-549-5.

'Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids' by Eline Snell. www.Amazon.co.uk

‘Mindfulness: Finding peace in a frantic world’ by Professor Mark Williams and Dr Danny Penman. Published by Piatkus Books, ISBN 9780749953089.

After a traumatic event

When a member of your family has sustained a spinal cord injury (SCI), it is understandable if you are feeling under stress or anxious, not only for the person who has sustained the SCI, but also for you and your family.

What may be the cause of your stress and anxiety?

Some of your anxiety and stress could be due to the fact that you may be trying to juggle a variety of everyday tasks as well as coming to the hospital to visit your relative.

Perhaps some of your everyday activities are about looking after young children or elderly parents, or it may be that you have other responsibilities such as work, running your own business or have other commitments. You may find it difficult to get to the hospital because you live far away or rely on others to bring you to the hospital.

Sometimes, anxiety can also be caused by other underlying problems prior to your relative’s SCI. It is therefore not surprising if these factors leave you feeling emotionally and physically drained. Stress can affect how you feel, think or behave as well as having an impact on your health and wellbeing.

As individuals, we all experience and respond to challenging events in different ways. During this period in your life it is quite normal if you feel less able to cope or find it difficult to keep on top of everyday activities. Feeling stressed and anxious is a distressing experience in itself, but there are steps you can take to help you and your family manage and adapt so that you feel more in control of your life.

This leaflet provides some helpful information and guidance, in addition to listing other areas of support that you can access from both within and outside the NSIC.

Coping with everyday pressures

When we become stressed, it can be a result of how we are coping with daily pressures. Sometimes stress can have positive results, with the release of adrenaline which may leave you feeling energised, focussed and motivated. However, some people experience prolonged periods of stress which can lead to depression, raised blood pressure and other negative health results. We are all different and it does not mean that stress will impact on everyone in the same way.

Sometimes stress can turn into anxiety if a person feels apprehensive about the future. Intrusive thoughts and images may interfere with everyday activities, ultimately leaving that person feeling less able to cope with everyday challenges.

How do I know whether I am suffering from stress and anxiety?

This is a general guide to some of the thoughts and feelings that people experience when they are feeling stressed:-

Physical symptoms

- Muscle tension
- Headaches
- Dry mouth

SIA Peer Adviser

The Advisor visits the NSIC 3 days a week and has a stand in the main foyer (near the café) on the ground floor.

Back Up Trust Family Mentoring

Tel: 020 8875 1805

This service was set up to support partners and parents of people with SCI and can help you seek guidance on accessing information or services for your family after your relative has been discharged from the NSIC

The Hospital Chaplaincy Service

Tel: 01296 316675

Staff

Talk to any member of staff on the ward

Useful books and CDs

‘Coping with Anxiety’ by the Department of Clinical Psychology, NSIC, Stoke Mandeville Hospital, BHT

‘Auto hypnotic Relaxation CD including ‘Sounds of the Sea ‘ ‘ by Professor Paul Kennedy. This CD can be obtained directly from the Department of Clinical Psychology

Audio CD: ‘Relaxation Techniques, Reduce Stress and Anxiety and Enhance Well-Being’ by Lilian Nejad and Katerina Volny. This can be ordered through www.Amazon.co.uk

Please contact the Clinical Psychology Department for further information on dates and registration at 01296 315823.

Please see later in this leaflet for additional information on supporting Teenagers and children (page 11).

Professional Support within the NSIC and outside the hospital

Additional areas where you can receive support are:

The Family Counselling Service

Tel: 01296 315858

Should you wish to talk about the contents of this leaflet or speak to a professional counsellor, please contact the Family Counsellor on the above telephone number.

Leaflets on the Family Counselling Service are on display on the wards and in the main foyer.

The Department of Clinical Psychology at the NSIC

Tel: 01296 315823

The Spinal Injuries Association (SIA)

Tel: 0845 678 6633 or www.spinal.co.uk

SIA offer the following services:- **Freephone advice line on 0800 980 0501**

Relatives Message board and Relative Link Scheme

They also have an extensive range of leaflets on SCI.

- Nausea
- Feeling shaky or dizzy
- Racing heart
- Bowel or bladder problems
- Sweating
- Exhaustion
- Palpitations
- Feeling generally run down

Emotional symptoms, behaviour and thoughts

- Spontaneous intense emotion
- Sleep difficulties
- Irritability or anger
- Low in mood
- Racing thoughts and difficulty in concentrating
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Numbness
- Excessive drinking
- Loss of appetite or binge eating
- Inability to relax
- Feeling very unsociable
- Short-term memory loss

How to reduce your stress

The best way to lower stress levels is to take some time out and be more kind to yourself, especially around expectations on how you should be coping. Although you may be playing a key part in supporting your relative during their rehabilitation, it is important that you listen to your body when it is telling you to slow down. To continually ignore these signs could lead to further health problems.

How to take control of your life

You may find any of the following steps helpful:

- Think about the things that have helped you to relax in the past – perhaps it might be listening to music, humour, meeting up with friends, reading a book?
- If you find it difficult to relax or sleep, yoga, meditation or relaxation and breathing techniques are very helpful
- Eat balanced, healthy and regular meals and/or snacks to provide the energy you need
- Avoid large amounts of caffeine, alcohol, sugar or nicotine
- Get some fresh air and cardiovascular exercise such as walking, jogging, swimming or playing some form of sport. Any or all of these pursuits can help to maintain your wellbeing
- Find ways to switch off – try something new or resume a relaxing activity and avoid highly stimulating activities, particularly at the end of the day
- Give yourself permission to feel sad, to cry and to talk
- Buy a notebook and write down all the things that are worrying you. This helps to empty the mind and may be useful in the afternoon, so as to avoid stimulation before going to sleep

- Share responsibilities with other family members or friends who are willing to help.

See later within the leaflet for additional areas of support.

What are the benefits of stress reduction?

Looking after yourself and managing your stress levels can help you to survive a particularly demanding period in your life, enable you to think more clearly, and become more receptive to any changes and adaptations that you may have to make in your life. Lowering stress levels can also be beneficial to your health by reducing blood pressure and helping to alleviate depression. You may find that managing stress in healthy ways has a positive impact on your loved one.

Children and teenagers' reaction to their parent or sibling sustaining an SCI

Most children and teenagers will adjust well in times of difficulty as long as they feel safe and loved. When there is an illness or injury in the family, some of the younger members of your family may need a little bit of extra support in order to adjust. You may discuss these concerns with the Family Counsellor or one of the Clinical Psychologists.

The Department of Clinical Psychology holds a Young Relatives Support Workshop open to all child relatives (e.g. children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters) between the ages of 6 to 16 in Autumn each year. The Workshop is an opportunity for any child who has a relative with SCI to meet other young people, have their questions answered, learn about SCI and have fun in an imaginative and enjoyable setting here at the NSIC