

Changes over Six Years in Secondary Health Conditions and Activity Limitations in Older Adults Aging with Long-Term Spinal Cord Injury

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INTRODUCTION

There is limited knowledge about changes in secondary health conditions (SHCs) and activity limitations over time in individuals aging with long-term spinal cord injury (SCI).

Method: To determine changes in SHCs and activity limitations in older adults with long term SCI over six years, and investigate how these changes are associated with gender, age and injury characteristics.

METHODS

Longitudinal cohort study, part of the Swedish Aging with Spinal Cord Injury Study (SASCIS). N = 78 (32% women), mean age 68 years, injury levels C1-L3, AIS A-D, mean time since injury 31 years.

RESULTS

Over six years, there were increases in the occurrence of bowel-related problems (31% to 47%, $P = .015$), constipation (12% to 24%, $P = .013$), frequent urinary tract infections (10% to 26%, $P = .004$), use of indwelling urinary catheters (15% to 23%, $P = .031$), other bladder-related problems (4% to 22%, $P < .001$) and spasticity (41% to 62%, $P < .001$). The occurrence of pain was high (85%), with no significant change. Activity limitations increased (SCIM III total score mean 67 to 61, $P < .001$, with significant decreases in all subscales). The increase in bowel-related problems was greater in males, and the deterioration in self-care greater in participants with longer time since injury and traumatic injuries.

CONCLUSION

These findings support the notion that SHCs and activity limitations increase over time in older adults aging with long-term SCI. The results can inform clinicians and call for a proactive, holistic approach in the long-term follow-up to support healthy and active aging.