



Research Brief

Association of Secondary Health Conditions with Future Chronic Health Conditions Among Persons with Traumatic Spinal Cord Injury

Introduction

Secondary health conditions are additional physical and mental health conditions that occur after a disability, such as pain, pressure injuries, and anxiety. Studies have found that secondary health conditions increase the risk of negative health outcomes among people with traumatic spinal cord injury. Our study uses information from our self-report assessments to look at chronic health conditions (such as diabetes, cancer, and high cholesterol) in adults with traumatic spinal cord injury, changes in chronic health conditions at a follow-up measurement, and the associations of baseline secondary health conditions with future chronic health conditions.

Key Findings

- The percentage of participants having at least one chronic health condition, and the likelihood of three individual chronic health conditions increased from baseline to follow-up.
- Anxiety disorders at baseline was associated with 25% greater number of chronic health conditions at follow-up, while a pain interference score of 1 point higher was related to 6% greater number of chronic health conditions at follow-up.
- As expected, the number of chronic health conditions at follow-up was also positively associated with longer years post injury, older age at injury, and taking medication at the baseline.

Conclusion

Our results suggest an association between secondary health conditions and chronic health conditions. There may be some pattern in which secondary health conditions develop and potentially lead to a greater risk of chronic health conditions. At a minimum, the presence of pain and anxiety disorders should be considered potential concerns for an unfolding pattern of chronic health conditions.

Health practitioners may assess anxiety disorders and pain interference as precursors to multiple chronic health conditions. The presence of each suggests a greater likelihood of chronic health conditions moving forward. Pain interfering with activities may particularly limit activities that may result in the development of chronic health conditions at a later time. Preventing secondary health conditions is always a priority with people with traumatic spinal cord injury and implementing successful prevention strategies by health care professionals may carry over to a reduced risk of chronic health conditions.