

## Unintentional Injuries after SCI: A Word from the Prevention Committee

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, unintentional injuries continue to be the fifth leading cause of death overall, and the leading cause of death for those under 35 years of age in the US. The top three causes of fatal unintentional injuries include motor vehicle crashes, poisoning, and falls. Two of those etiologies happen to be the leading causes of SCI in the US: motor vehicle crashes and falls. According to the SCI Model System National Data and Statistical Center, since 2010, the etiology SCI caused by vehicular accidents was 36.5% while falls were 28.5%.

Many unintentional injuries and emergencies can be prevented with simple education and environment and lifestyle changes. Potential triggers or causes of unintentional injuries *after* SCI may include: poor motor functioning, reduced ability to balance, limited range of motion, or substance use. Additionally, for individuals who may have incurred a concomitant brain injury at the time of their SCI, reduced cognitive functioning, poor decision making, disinhibition, diminished safety skills and increased risk taking also increase the risk for subsequent unintentional injuries. Further, everyday activities such as taking medications, reaching for items, sports, and driving have the potential for further injury.

Suggestions for preventing additional injury are similar to those discussed in primary prevention and include following basic safety guidelines like using safety equipment during sports/work, wearing a seatbelt while in a vehicle, having, using, and maintaining safety equipment in the home (bath mats, handrails, bed or chair alarms, smoke detectors, fire extinguisher, etc.), not over-reaching for items; taking and storing medications appropriately, avoid clutter, etc...

The bottom line is individuals with SCI may be in a compromised state post-injury leading to an increased risk of additional unintentional injury. With collaboration and attention to safety precautions many of these other injuries can be avoided.