

*“Consulting with an experienced Florida personal injury accident attorney is the best way to determine what legal rights to compensation you may have; however, in the meantime it may be beneficial to understand more about spinal cord injuries.”*

# PERSONAL INJURY ACCIDENT INJURIES

## Spinal Cord Injuries



AMANDA POWERS SELLERS AND JENNA C. FINKELSTEIN



A personal injury accident can cause a wide variety of injuries to the victim. Some of those injuries are minor, such as sprained or strained muscles or soft tissue injuries. Some injuries, however, are serious, even life-threatening. Spinal cord injuries, or SCI, are among the most severe injuries. If you suffered a SCI in a Florida personal injury accident that was caused, in whole or in part, by another party you may be entitled to compensation for your injuries. Consulting with an experienced Florida personal injury accident attorney is the best way to determine what legal rights to compensation you may have; however, in the meantime it may be beneficial to understand more about spinal cord injuries.

## SPINAL CORD INJURY FACTS AND FIGURES

Most people think of a spinal cord injury as a rare occurrence when, in fact, spinal cord injuries are actually a rather common result of a personal injury accident. Not all SCI result in catastrophic injury to the victim; however, there are likely more people living with serious spinal cord injuries in the U.S. than you realize. In fact, many of the facts and figures relating to spinal cord injuries may be surprising.

- There are approximately 273,000 people living with a SCI in the United States.
- Average age at injury is 42.6 years.
- Males suffer over 80 percent of all SCI injuries.
- Motor vehicle collisions cause 36.5 percent of all SCIs.
- Sports injuries cause 9.2 percent of all SCIs.
- Approximately 60 percent of victims are employed at the time of their SCI injury. Only 12 percent remain employed one year post injury.
- Spinal cord injury is the second leading cause of paralysis in the U.S., following stroke as the number one cause.
- Life expectancy drops, on average, by 10-20 percent for a person living with a SCI.
- Lifetime cost of treating a SCI are estimated to be anywhere from \$1 million to \$4.6 million, depending on the age at onset and the severity of the injury.

## THE HUMAN SPINE

The human spinal cord is truly an amazing structure. Your spinal cord is essentially a long bundle of nervous tissue and support cells that runs from the base of your skull down through your spinal column to the space between the first and second lumbar vertebrae. Your spinal cord, along with your brain, make up your central nervous system. Your spinal cord serves three major functions:

- A conduit for motor information traveling down the spinal cord
- A conduit for sensory information traveling up the spinal cord
- A center for coordinating certain reflexes

There are 31 pairs of nerves that leave your spinal cord and extend out to your arms, legs, chest, and abdomen. Each spinal cord segment serves a specific motor and sensory region of your body. The upper section of your spinal cord is responsible for sending and receiving messages from the upper section of your body, including your arms, while the lower section is responsible for messages to your lower extremities, including your legs.

Your brain sends messages down through your spinal cord to various parts of your body telling your body what to do. For example, if you want to pick up a cup of coffee your brain sends that command down through your spinal cord to the nerves that run down your arm and into your hand. If the coffee spills and it is hot, that message is then sent back up the reverse path to your brain. Your brain then sends a message back to let go

of the cup to avoid further injury. Of course, this entire process occurs so fast you are unaware it is happening.

## **INJURY TO YOUR SPINAL CORD**

Although your spinal cord is protected by the spinal column, damage can occur. Chronic conditions can cause gradual injury to the spinal column; however, acute trauma is what typically causes injury to the spinal cord itself. When the spinal cord is injured, the “message relay system” is damaged. The extent of the damage can vary with complete paralysis occurring in the most severe injuries.

Spinal cord injuries are classified in many ways, starting with whether the injury was complete or incomplete. A complete injury means that no motor function remains below the level where the cord was injured after the injury. An incomplete injury means the victim retains some motor function below the level of injury. Paralysis caused by a SCI is further classified as:

- Tetraplegia -- also known as quadriplegia, this means your arms, hands, trunk, legs and pelvic organs are all affected by your spinal cord injury.
- Paraplegia -- this paralysis affects all or part of the trunk, legs and pelvic organs.

## **SYMPTOMS OF A SPINAL CORD INJURY**

Anytime a spinal cord injury is suspected it is crucial that the victim not be moved and that emergency personnel be called to the scene immediately. Further injury, including paralysis, can occur when a victim who has suffered a spinal cord injury is moved. Experts suggest that it is best to assume a spinal cord injury has occurred anytime a victim has suffered a blow to the head, fall, or other traumatic injury. Unfortunately, a spinal cord injury is not always obvious. A victim may not experience the symptoms of a SCI until hours, even days, after the injury. In the meantime, however, the injury has worsened and permanent damage has occurred. Although damage to the spinal cord cannot be reversed, getting a victim immediate medical attention can prevent further damage and/or exacerbation of the existing damage. When symptoms of a SCI are present, they may include any of the following:

- Loss of movement
- Loss of sensation, including the ability to feel heat, cold and touch
- Loss of bowel or bladder control
- Exaggerated reflex activities or spasms
- Changes in sexual function, sexual sensitivity and fertility
- Pain or an intense stinging sensation caused by damage to the nerve fibers in your spinal cord
- Difficulty breathing, coughing or clearing secretions from your lungs

## **TREATMENT OF A SPINAL CORD INJURY**

Despite advances in medicine and science over the last century, a way to reverse injury to your spinal cord remains elusive. Treatment of a SCI begins with preventing additional injury by ensuring that anyone with a suspected SCI receive a complete medical examination as soon after the accident or injury as possible. Once a SCI has been diagnosed a patient may need surgery to reduce swelling and relieve pressure on the spine and/or to stabilize the spine.

After the patient has been stabilized, treatment for a spinal cord injury typically focuses on rehabilitation, pain relief, and helping the patient adjust to the emotional and psychological aspects of the injury. Victims of a SCI often suffer from secondary conditions that must also be treated, including:

- Autonomic dysreflexia
- Bladder control issues
- Bowel management
- Depression
- Pain
- Respiratory problems
- Sexual health
- Skin care issues
- Spasticity
- Upper extremity care

Many medical professionals and scientists devote their entire career to trying to find a cure for the victims of a spinal cord injury; however, for now, the best that can be done is to make a SCI victim comfortable and provide him/her with the best quality of life possible despite the injury.

If you have suffered a spinal cord injury, or are the caretaker of a loved one who has, and you believe another party is responsible for the accident that caused the injury, contact an experienced Florida personal injury accident attorney as soon as possible.

National Spinal Cord Injury Statistics Center, [Spinal Cord Injury Facts and Figures at a Glance](#)

Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, [Paralysis Resource Center](#)

Shepherd Center, [Understanding Spinal Cord Injuries](#)

Medline Plus, [Spine Injuries and Disorders](#)

Mayo Clinic, [Spinal Cord Injury Symptoms](#)



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Amanda Powers Sellers**

Florida criminal defense lawyer, Amanda Powers Sellers, has aggressively defended thousands of Florida criminal cases. With over nine years of criminal jury trial experience, she has the necessary background to represent cases ranging from Driving under the Influence (DUI) to

**First Degree Murder.**

Amanda is a seasoned litigator and an aggressive negotiator. With a wealth of experience she has proven that her gentle, but aggressive style of criminal defense litigation consistently achieves results for her clients.



**Jenna C. Finkelstein**

Florida criminal defense attorney, Jenna Finkelstein, has over sixty (60) criminal jury trials to her credit. Her experience defending individuals charged with crimes in the state of Florida ranges from domestic battery to DUI Manslaughter, Sexual Battery, First Degree Murder and all

**crimes in between.**

She is passionate about the law and promises personal attention to all of her clients and their individual needs. Jenna is a seasoned trial attorney who knows the legal system and its players. Jenna and her team at the Law Offices of Powers Sellers & Finkelstein, PLC, are committed to fighting for you.

**Powers Sellers & Finkelstein, PLC**  
1465 South Fort Harrison Ave, Ste 202  
Clearwater, FL 33756  
727-531-2926  
<https://psffirm.com>