



## **Autonomic Dysreflexia**

Tetraplegics and those with spinal cord lesions above the T6 level can suffer a life-threatening condition known as autonomic dysreflexia. Autonomic Dysreflexia is a condition unique to those with spinal injuries.

Autonomic Dysreflexia occurs when there is a rapid surge in blood pressure caused by pain, irritation or over-stimulation in a paralysed part of the body. Normally the body's response to pain would be to constrict the blood vessels and speed up the heart, however because of the spinal cord injury the control mechanisms don't operate and the blood pressure rises rapidly, if untreated the condition can lead to seizures, cerebral haemorrhage, cardiac arrest and death.

### **Signs to look for**

- Pounding headache
- Goose pimples
- Profuse sweating
- Flushed/blotchy skin
- High blood pressure (Tetraplegic blood pressure usually low 90/60)

### **Possible Causes**

- Over full bladder, perhaps caused by blocked catheter
- Urinary Tract Infection
- Constipation
- Wind
- Suppository insertion
- Pressure sore
- In-growing toenail
- Menstrual cramps
- Pregnancy/Labour/Delivery
- Ejaculation during sexual intercourse
- Burns/scalds

### **Treatment**

- Remove the cause (if possible)
- Place client into sitting position
- If you are not able to find the stimulus causing the autonomic dysreflexia or your attempts to relieve the stimulus have not stopped the symptoms (particularly the pounding headache), you will need emergency medical treatment.

\* You may have an Emergency Card to carry with advice of what to do in an emergency.