Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) with Spinal Cord Injury

The urinary system includes the kidneys, ureters, and bladder. These parts work together to filter the blood and remove extra fluid from the body as urine. After a spinal cord injury, it can be harder to control and fully empty the bladder. This can increase the risk of a urinary tract infection (UTI) for several reasons:

- Urine staying in the bladder too long
- Bacteria entering the body during catheter use
- Trouble noticing or cleaning up after bladder accidents

UTI is common with SCI and it is important to consult a doctor for medical intervention and advice in order to prevent further complications such as kidney infection and sepsis. Warning signs to look for include the following:

- Fever or chills
- Autonomic dysreflexia
- Burning during urination
- Increased urge to urinate or cath
- Changes in spasticity
- Altered mental status and/or confusion
- Fatigue and/or vomiting
- Mild low back pain or body aches
- Headaches
- Cloudy or foul-smelling urine (this may occur for reasons other than a urinary tract infection, such as dietary changes, and is not always a sign of infection on its own)

UTI Prevention Tips

- **Empty the bladder regularly:** Follow your bladder program and don't wait too long between emptying.
- **Use clean catheter technique:** Wash your hands before and after. Use clean supplies and proper technique each time.
- **Stay well hydrated:** Drink enough fluids (usually water) to help flush bacteria from the urinary system. Try to limit caffeine (coffee, tea, soda) and alcohol, as they can irritate the bladder and may increase dehydration.
- **Keep the genital area clean and dry:** Clean daily and after any bladder accidents to reduce bacteria on the skin.
- **Avoid holding urine too long:** Letting urine sit in the bladder increases the risk of infection.
- **Watch for signs of infection**

Urinary tract infections are common following spinal cord injury due to changes in bladder function and urinary management. Recognizing symptoms early and maintaining good preventive practices can help reduce the risk of complications.

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Individuals should consult a qualified healthcare provider for personalized guidance, especially if symptoms of a urinary tract infection are present or if there are any concerns about changes in health status.