

The Duke of Cornwall Spinal
Treatment Centre

ALERT CARD

AUTONOMIC DYSREFLEXIA
IS A **MEDICAL EMERGENCY**

Name:

General Symptoms

(These may be of variable severity)

1. Pounding headache which increases in intensity as blood pressure rises.
2. Flushing or blotching of skin above the level of the spinal cord injury.
3. Profuse sweating particularly above the level of the spinal cord injury.

Own Symptoms:

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What Is It?

Autonomic Dysreflexia is an uninhibited sympathetic nervous system response to a variety of noxious stimuli occurring in people with spinal cord injury at the thoracic six (T6) level and above.

(Consortium for Spinal Cord Medicine Clinical Practice Guidelines, 2001).

A.D. is considered a medical emergency. It can develop suddenly and if it is not treated promptly it can lead to seizures, stroke and even death.

Common Causes

- Inadequate bladder drainage, e.g. blocked catheter.
- Distended bowel, insertion of suppositories or digital stimulation / haemorrhoids / anal fissure.
- In-grown toe nail.
- Pressure ulcers.
- Labour.
- Ejaculation / Orgasm.

Any painful stimulus below the level of spinal cord lesion can potentially trigger A.D.

Treatment

- Always sit person upright
- Ascertain cause
- Administer Nifedipine capsules (5mgs – 10mgs) bite + swallow liquid
- Take necessary action to reduce blood pressure

1. If catheter is blocked, **do not instil further fluid**, remove and re-catheterise.
2. Evacuate full rectum using anaesthetic lubricant, e.g. Instillagel.

If blood pressure continues to rise despite intervention, **please seek urgent local medical assistance or dial 999**

Advice to treating clinicians:

Please contact the On-Call Spinal Consultant via the main Hospital Switchboard on **(01722) 336262** for further advice if required.

Notes for General Practitioners

If Nifedipine is not available, GTN spray x2 puffs should be given. Nifedipine should be avoided in cardiac disease or the over 60's.

NB: Avoid Glyceryl Trinitrate (GTN) if you have used Viagra (Sildenafil) in the past 24 hours.

Hypertension

The normal blood pressure for this group is commonly 90/60 lying and lower when sitting.

A blood pressure of 130/90 may be hypertensive.

If untreated it can rapidly rise to extreme levels e.g. 200/130mmHg.