

Quadriplegia Encyclopedia Article

Quadriplegia

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Quadriplegia

A complete paralysis of the arms, legs, and trunk, usually occurring after a severe injury to the spinal cord between the fifth and seventh vertebrae. Spastic quadriplegia is a condition present at birth often accompanied by vision problems, seizures, and mental retardation.

Treatment of quadriplegia includes physical and psychological therapy as well as mechanical support of any normal functions made impossible by blockage of the sympathetic nervous system. The quadriplegic patient needs assistance in maintaining respiration, proper body temperature, and bowel and urinary functions. Children born with spastic quadriplegia usually require perpetual, comprehensive care. The degree of **mental retardation** will dictate the level of the child's education and independence.

When quadriplegia occurs as the result of an injury, the patient will likely suffer a period of grief and/or **depression**. The sudden loss of control of nearly all bodily functions is devastating. Counseling should be provided to help the patient successfully progress through this stage. In severe injuries, parents and patients may consider the withdrawal of life support. Such decisions should not be made until the patient has completed rehabilitation, and all parties are made aware of the long-term physiological and psychological consequences of the injury.

Independence is of utmost concern to the quadriplegic, and every effort should be made to assist him or her in achieving it. Approximately 150,000 Americans are afflicted with quadriplegia, and many are able to lead independent lives through the use of electric wheelchairs and mouthsticks that facilitate the use of push-button telephones, cassette recorders, computers, and myriad other tools for modern living. Organizations such as the National Easter Seals Society are available to help patients and families design accessible living spaces. Helping Hands is a unique non-profit group that trains capuchin monkeys to assist quadriplegics. In 1994 a cough stimulator was invented that assists quadriplegics who have lost the cough reflex. A pocket-sized version is expected by the year 2000.

For Further Study

Periodicals

Exceptional Parent Magazine

Address: 209 Harvard Street, Suite 303
Brookline, MA 02146-5005

Telephone: (617) 730-5800

FAX: (617) 730-8742



Organizations

Helping Hands

Address: Boston University School of Medicine

1505 Commonwealth Avenue

Boston, MA 02135

Telephone: (617) 787-4419

National Easter Seals Society

Address: 230 W. Monroe Street

Chicago, IL 60606

Telephone: (312) 726-6200; toll-free (800) 786-7437

FAX: (312) 726-1494

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities

Address: P.O. Box **1492**

Washington, DC 20013

Telephone: (202) 884-8200; toll-free (800) 695-0285

FAX: (202) 884-8441