

WHEN THE UNTHINKABLE HAPPENS – SPINAL CORD INJURIES

PART 1

Most of us rarely consider the extraordinary ramifications that would occur if we were to become the victim of a spinal cord injury.

Imagine if you suffered a “complete” (meaning both sides of the body are affected equally and both sides are rendered useless) spinal cord injury. You would have NO function, NO feeling, NO sensation, and NO movement below the site of the injury. You could also suffer bladder or bowel problems, and breathing problems. Needless to say, it would dramatically change your life and the lives of your loved ones who would have to care for you.

Why is a spinal cord injury so serious? Because the spinal cord and the brain make up the central nervous system in the human body. The spinal cord is a “superhighway” of sorts, on which nerve impulses travel from the brain down through the body. It is surrounded by a protective column of bones called “vertebrae.” You can suffer injuries to your vertebrae (such as a broken back). The pads between your vertebrae are called “discs.” You can also suffer injuries to your discs (such as a bulge or a herniation). These are less serious than a spinal cord injury, but damage to your vertebrae or discs put your spinal cord health in jeopardy, and left untreated, vertebrae and disc injuries can cause painful and permanent nerve damage.

The degree of seriousness of a spinal cord injury usually is related to the place on the spinal cord where the injury occurs—the higher up your back and spinal cord, the more damage you will suffer because everything below the injury will be affected. “Paraplegia” results from an injury to the middle of your spinal column which renders the lower part of your body paralyzed. “Quadriplegia” results in total paralysis of your body and is caused by damage to the cervical portion of the spinal cord located near your neck.

Obviously, the financial impact of a spinal cord injury can be catastrophic. In addition to medical costs that will be incurred over the lifetime of the victim, there will be lost wages, loss of enjoyment of life, emotional damage, and pain and suffering. All of these can add up to a

considerable amount of money.

These injuries can be traumatic for both the injured person and his or her family. Sometimes the injured person can work things out on his or her own, but sometimes the process becomes cumbersome, complicated or confusing. Then, it may be necessary to retain an attorney to carefully review and present all of the legal complexities and nuances of the claim, allowing the injured person to focus his or her energy on recovery.

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