

Questions and Answers

1) How do you get a C&P exam and what is the process to get referred?

To get a Compensation and Pension exam to determine your service connectedness you must first fill out a service disability application. Rather than fill out an online application it is best to have a Veterans service officer help you fill it out. The PVA, Disable American Veterans, VFW and other Veteran's Service organizations each have service officers that provide this service. The application is then sent to the Veterans Benefit Office (locally for Palo Alto the office is located in Oakland). Once the application is processed you will be notified and given a date to be examined. If you cannot make the appointment that is given to you it is very important that you let them know and have it rescheduled. If you do not show up for the exam you will have to begin the whole application process over. The person that examines you fills out a report that goes back to your benefits office and is matched with your service record. The VBO office then determines your level of service connection.

2) What is the difference between an MRI, CT scan and regular X-Ray and when is one ~~better to~~ better to get rather than the other?

X-rays allow for one and two dimensional pictures while CAT scans and MRIs provide 3 dimensional pictures. X-rays and CAT scans use radiation while the MRI uses a magnet. MRIs are used for soft tissue such as the spinal cord, muscles and nerves. CAT scans and MRIs can be used with contrast agents to help visualize structures better. The contrast dye for CAT scans are injected into the blood and can be traced thru the vessels while contrast agent used with MRI's are processed by the body tissue and can show active areas of injury.

3) How does the FES bike work and when is it recommended for Physical Therapy? Can I get an FES bike when I am discharged home?

Functional electrical stimulation (FES) involves placing surface electrodes over muscles. The small machine then sends electrical pulses to the electrodes that make the muscles contract. FES can be used to increase circulation by causing muscle pumping and can help improve joint range of motion. FES is also used immediately after injury to

potentially stimulate muscles that have a chance to recover by maintain muscle mass and stimulating the connections to the muscle.

4) Can losing weight help with pain management? I can't exercise as hard as I would like, but I want to lose some weight. People told me to diet and cut out carbohydrates. Any more advice I can get on losing weight with a spinal cord injury?

Weight loss can reduce pain. By reducing your body weight there is less stress on your whole musculoskeletal system. Studies that have investigated groups of people receiving various treatments have shown that losing weight alone can often decrease back pain. It is hard to reduce carbohydrates. Eating less processed foods, low-fat dairy, whole grains (i.e. oatmeal, high fiber cereals will help). You can directly talk to a nutritionist and or dietician at the VA to help get a plan for you. Also speak with your therapists (Physical, Occupational and Recreational) that can all help you to develop a customized exercise program.

5) What is H-Wave therapy and how does it work?

H-wave therapy uses electrical signals and involves placing surface electrodes over muscles and then sending the H-wave electrical signals to stimulate the muscles and nerves. It is used to promote circulation and relive pain. It causes gentle contraction of your slow twitch muscle fibers. It is the stimulation of the nerve fibers that are thought to provide a longer lasting analgesic effect. In general it is used 2 times a day for 30 minutes but can be used for longer. TENs units are different as they are used to block pain signals at a local site by providing a hypersensory response that block pain signals to the brain.

6) I know my blood pressure is lower because of my SCI. Does it get higher as I age like other people or will it stay the same?

Blood pressure is lower as a result of SCI because there is less nervous system input to your heart muscle. Higher blood pressures results from buildup of plaques that form on our arteries that in turn narrow the diameter of the arteries and thus increase pressure. This occurs with normal aging but also from poor nutritional habits. Persons with SCI have a higher prevalence of cardiac disease in part due to the buildup of plaque. Higher blood pressure puts you at risk for heart attacks and stroke.

7) I've been injured over 20 years and my bladder function seems to be less and I've had some bad episodes of AD. Anything differently I should be doing with my bladder program?

With aging your bladder naturally loses some of its flexibility and becomes stiffer. Normally the bladder stretches as it fills. Because the bladder is stiffer when it is stretched it sets off a stretch reaction which can cause autonomic dysreflexia. Treatment may include; injections to relax the bladder, medications and or surgical interventions.

8) My caregiver and wife need a big break from providing help to me. What services are available to get temporary help so everyone can get a break?

Every spinal cord injured Veteran is entitled to 30 days of respite inpatient care. Respite care can be prescribed by any provider but it is usually best to speak with your social worker to get the details. A two week block is often a great time frame. There is an opportunity to get in home care; however, not past 8 hours a day. There are also opportunities to use a health aide that can provide in home help 3 times a week. Respite for SCI can occur in the SCI inpatient unit at Palo Alto. Respite can also occur at Menlo Park and each place has different opportunities so you should consult your social worker.

9) I want to stop smoking. What are the general health benefits of giving up cigarettes for someone with SCI?

Smoking is directly linked with lung cancer. Your risk of lung cancer goes down on the first day you stop smoking. Because lung function is affected this in turn affects your ability to heal small and larger wounds. The risk of burning yourself with cigarettes because of decreased skin sensation is also a risk. Smoking has been linked with increased atherosclerosis (plaque in your blood vessels). While cigarettes have been directly linked with cancer, vaping as an alternative may be just as dangerous. There is not enough evidence as of yet to make a clear determination. Vaping avoids the toxic smoke from cigarettes, but still contains chemicals like propylene glycol which is a known eye irritant and cause of respiratory infections. The VA provides prescription medications to help one stop smoking and has a whole smoking cessation program. No referral is necessary. Call 1-650-493-5000 **(1-1)**, ext. 60557.