



AUTONOMIC DYSREFLEXIA



AUTONOMIC DYSREFLEXIA & YOU

Recognize and act

WHAT IS AUTONOMIC DYSREFLEXIA (AD)?

It is a dangerous rise in your blood pressure that is triggered by a painful or non-painful stimulation below the level of your spinal cord injury (SCI). Below your SCI, your body cannot detect these stimulations and has difficulty properly responding to them. As a result, your blood pressure (BP) can go up quite fast and can lead to serious consequences such as stroke, heart attack or even death.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AD?

If you have AD, you may feel: a pounding headache • blurry vision or seeing spots • sweating (usually above your SCI) • nasal congestion • nausea • anxiety • difficulty breathing

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF AD?

If you have AD, you may experience: a rapid increase in BP (20-40 mmHg above your normal BP) • slow heart rate • upper body flushing (reddening of skin) • goosebumps (usually above your SCI)

WHAT CAUSES AD?

Episodes of AD are most commonly caused by bladder problems, which can be related to: a full bladder • urinary tract infection • blocked catheters • bladder or kidney stones

Other common causes include problems with:

bowel or abdomen (constipation, bowel or abdominal exams) • tight clothing or equipment (belt around the waist, shoes or shoelaces, leg braces) • musculoskeletal/skin (pressure sores, ingrown toe nails, broken bones or fractures) • sexual activity (genital stimulation, especially with a vibrator; ejaculation) • reproductive system (menstruation, pregnancy [labour and delivery])

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE AD?

You must act quickly! Perform the following steps or ask someone for help if you cannot do them yourself:

1. Sit up if you are lying down or lift your head to a 90 degree angle. You must remain seated otherwise your AD could get worse!
2. Loosen or remove any tight clothing or equipment.
3. If you have equipment to measure your BP, measure it every 5 minutes to see if it goes down to your normal level.
4. Check your bladder. If full, empty it immediately! If you have an indwelling catheter, check if the tubing is blocked, preventing your bladder from emptying.
5. If your blood pressure goes down and your symptoms subside, call your physician and report your symptoms and the steps you took to treat them.
6. If the AD signs and symptoms persist or come back call your country's Emergency Telephone Number and go to the emergency room (ER)!

WHERE CAN YOU GO TO TREAT YOUR AD?

If your AD persists you should go the nearest ER. Remember to:

1. Present your wallet-sized Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) AD information card to the medical staff. Tell them you may be experiencing AD and ask to be treated right away.
2. Have your BP measured as soon as possible.
3. Remain in a seated position until your BP goes down.
4. Remind the medical staff to search for the cause of your AD (e.g. bladder, bowel, or other causes listed above).

WHAT OTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON AD?

The PVA consumer self-help guide: ***Autonomic Dysreflexia:***

What you should know. www.pva.org

A wallet-sized AD information card is also provided with the PVA guide. If you have previously experienced AD, you should carry this card with you at all times.

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