

Autonomic Dysreflexia (AD) (Hyperreflexia)



IH-IV-150
W.D. 9/01
Pg. 1 of 2

What is AD?

This is a very dangerous problem of spinal cord injury (SCI). In AD, your blood pressure gets too high. This is an emergency because you could have a stroke or seizure, or even die. This rise in blood pressure is the way your body reacts to pain, even if you can't feel the thing causing the pain.

What are the common causes of AD?

- A full or bloated bladder
- A bladder infection
- Bad constipation (hard, dry stools)
- Bedsores
- Cuts, burns, sunburns or broken bones
- Ingrown toenails
- Tight clothes or a leg bag strapped on too tightly
- Anything painful

How will I know if I have AD?

The symptoms of AD may be:

- A very bad pounding headache
- Seeing spots in front of your eyes
- Blurred vision
- Goosebumps above the level of your injury
- Sweating above the level of your injury
- Stuffy nose
- Red flushing of the face and chest above the level of your injury
- Feeling restless and jittery (not able to be still)

When someone checks you they may find:

- Slower heart beats
- Blood pressure 20 - 40 mm Hg above your usual blood pressure

(over)

What should I do if I have these symptoms?

- Sit up or raise your head and upper body.
- Take off Ace wraps, TED hose, an abdominal binder, leg bag or any tight clothes you may have on.
- If you have a urinary catheter, check to be sure it is draining well and not kinked or clogged or the bag is not full.
- If you catheterize yourself, empty your bladder.
- Follow your bowel program to have a bowel movement (BM).
- If digital stimulation is what brought on the AD symptoms, stop right away.
- Check your body for bedsores, injuries, ingrown toenails or broken bones.

**If you have tried all these things, and you still have symptoms,
call the Telephone Triage Nurse Line at (214) 266-8777,
or come to the Ambulatory Care Clinic (ACC) or
the Emergency Department**

**Be sure to tell all your healthcare providers that you are at risk for AD.
Make sure they know how bad this problem can be.**