

The spinal column consists of 33 bones or vertebrae, which support the body and surround the spinal cord for protection. Discs separate the vertebrae, which act like shock absorbers. The spinal cord consists of nerves and fibres, which transmit messages from the brain to the rest of the body. If the cord is damaged or cut, communication between the brain and the rest of the body ceases below the injured site.

**Damage can be permanent.**

## DEFINITION OF A SPINAL INJURY

Paraplegia: Paralysis of the legs and lower part of the body.

Quadriplegia: Paralysis of all four limbs, from the neck down.

## Causes

- Traffic accidents
- Sporting accidents
- Diving accidents
- Gunshot wounds
- Heavy falls or falls from a height.

## Signs and Symptoms may include:

- History of injury
- Pain in the neck or back.
- Tenderness
- Weakness or inability to move the arms or legs.
- Casualty has symptoms of pins and needles in the limbs.
- Loss of power in limbs.

## Treatment of a Conscious Casualty

Follow the Basic First Aid Plan to assess the casualty

- ✗ DO NOT MOVE THE CASUALTY UNLESS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER.
- ✓ Reassure the casualty.
- ✓ Keep the casualty still.
- ✓ Call for an Ambulance.
- ✓ Support the neck.
  - manual support head & neck
  - cervical collar may be applied – towel, jumper
- ✓ Treat any other injuries

If an Ambulance is required - call immediately - do not delay

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## Treatment of an Unconscious Casualty

Follow the Basic First Aid Plan to assess the casualty

- ✓ Immobilise neck immediately
  - Manually support head & neck
  - cervical collar may be applied (if you have the skill)
- ✓ With as much assistance as possible log roll the casualty onto their side.
  - ✗ DO NOT let the head or neck move
  - ✗ DO NOT TWIST, COMPRESS OR BEND THE BACK
- ✓ Maintain an open airway
- ✓ Complete examination and treat any other injuries
- ✓ Cover casualty with a blanket
- ✓ Monitor and record vital signs

## If injured in the water

- ✗ Do not remove the casualty unless unconscious or in danger
- ✓ Wait for expert help to arrive
- ✓ Manually support the head, neck and back
- ✓ If casualty has to be moved from the water, try and use a surfboard or a flotation device



Maintain support of the head and neck at all times

