
When a fall turns life upside down

INVITERT KOMMENTAR

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World Spinal Cord Injury Day is on 5 September 2025 and draws attention to the most common cause of traumatic spinal cord injury.

Falls can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time. They are the most common cause of personal injury, accounting for 50–55 % of injuries treated in the health service [\(1\)](#). Many falls occur at home, and older adults are particularly at risk. Fortunately, most falls are not serious, but some lead to life-changing injuries.

When a fall results in a spinal cord injury, the consequences are often severe and lifelong. Spinal cord injuries cause extensive functional impairments, including loss of motor control, sensory changes and loss of autonomic regulation, with partial or complete loss of bladder and bowel control [\(2\)](#). Such

losses often lead to psychological and social impacts in addition to the physical ones [\(2\)](#). Rehabilitation is a long-term process that requires highly specialised, multidisciplinary expertise to help patients regain the highest possible level of function, independence and quality of life. People with spinal cord injuries often need adjustments and accommodations in their home, at work and in relation to their social activities. Many need ongoing support from various services and regular follow-up across multiple tiers of health and social care [\(2\)](#).

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In the period 2011–2024, a total of 1647 new spinal cord injuries were registered in Norway, of which 956 were traumatic (data from the Norwegian Spinal Cord Injury Registry, not published as a complete dataset). Among these, falls were the cause in 46 % of cases, corresponding to 443 individuals. The average age was 56 years, and slightly more than half had an incomplete cervical spinal cord injury. According to registry data, men account for three out of four falls, and the 60–74 age group is particularly at risk.

Individuals with walking impairments due to degenerative cervical spinal stenosis are particularly vulnerable and face increased risk of falls and serious injury as a result [\(3\)](#). Narrowing of the central canal of the cervical spine can lead to spinal cord injury even from minor trauma, such as a fall from standing height [\(4\)](#). The ageing population means that the prevalence of both cervical spinal stenosis and falls is expected to rise. It is therefore important to raise awareness of cervical myelopathy among healthcare personnel and the general public. AO Spine Recode-DCM is an international initiative that has developed an evidence-based toolkit for early diagnosis and clinical follow-up of degenerative cervical myelopathy [\(5\)](#).

In Norway, rehabilitation for patients with spinal cord injuries is centralised in three hospitals: Sunnaas Hospital, Haukeland University Hospital and St Olav's Hospital, Trondheim University. Together, they are celebrating the 30th anniversary of national spinal cord injury rehabilitation this year. Since 2012, the Norwegian Spinal Cord Injury Registry (NorSCIR) has collected patient data from the three hospitals, providing insight into who is affected and how [\(6\)](#). The quality registry measures quality of care, promotes improvements in spinal cord injury care and serves as a resource for research [\(7\)](#). Patient-reported registry data capture the patient's perceptions of health-related quality of life and functional outcomes after injury.

NorSCIR and the clinical centres are seeing an increasing number of older spinal cord injury patients who have comorbidities [\(8\)](#). This is placing new demands on rehabilitation units to adapt and prioritise care, while also increasing the need for primary care services.

«These ongoing developments and the severe impact of falls make fall prevention a top priority»

These ongoing developments and the severe impact of falls make fall prevention a top priority. The Norwegian Directorate of Health recently issued national clinical recommendations that include guidelines on risk assessment and preventive measures (9). This year's World Spinal Cord Injury Day is a good opportunity to familiarise ourselves with them.

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