

# Information Sheet

## Skin Sensation

As a general rule, if a child has some loss of movement there will be some loss of skin sensation too. For example, a child who has no movement from below the mid-trunk level will generally have no feeling from that level downwards. He cannot feel anything inside (e.g. the need to go to the toilet) or outside (e.g. when something touches his leg).

For lower lesions, it is not so straightforward. A child may be able to walk fairly well and seem only to lack some movement in the feet, but the loss of sensation will usually be in some areas of the feet right up the legs to the buttocks.

Lack of sensation can cause significant problems for children. If they do not feel any pain, they may not pull away from painful stimuli or avoid danger.

### THREE COMMON PROBLEMS ARE:

#### 1. BURNS

Some common examples of burns are:

- Sunburn on the legs or feet, especially if shoes and socks are usually worn
- If the wheelchair is left in the hot sun, the child transferring back into it may burn their buttocks, legs and feet.
- From hot drinks or chips held on the lap
- From hot car or bus seats

N.B. Because of the poor circulation and nerve supply in the lower body of people with spina bifida the skin is often not strong and will burn more easily than normal.

#### Burns can be prevented by:

- Wearing shoes and socks
- Wearing long pants where practical
- **Always** checking for hot surfaces
  - **Awareness** by children and carers of the danger of burns

## 2. SCRAPES

Some common examples of scrapes are:

Children crawling on rough ground, especially pool surrounds may scrape their knees, ankles and toes.

During transfers from the floor to the wheelchair children may scrape themselves on the footplates.

During transfers from the wheelchair to a chair children may scrape their buttocks. This can be a big problem if it happens repeatedly.

N.B. Any scrape or scratch will probably take longer to heal than that of child without spina bi-fida.

**Scrapes can be prevented by:**

- Wearing shoes and socks
- Wearing long pants
- Wearing kneepads where practical
- Using good transferring techniques
- **Awareness** by children and carers of the danger of scrapes

## 3. PRESSURE AREAS

Pressure areas are red areas of skin caused by prolonged pressure on one area. Any red area that disappears within 30 minutes is no problem, but one which persists from day to day needs attention. Pressure areas can develop into very nasty sores if they are not treated early and effectively. They can in some cases take months or years to heal. **Treatment must always involve removing the pressure.**

Typical areas pressure sores develop are:

- On the buttocks and sacrum from prolonged sitting in a wheelchair
- On the heels and ankles from ill-fitting or incorrectly applied splints

**Pressure sores can be prevented by:**

- Regular bottom lifts for wheelchair users
- Using sheepskin or pressure-relieving cushions on wheelchairs
- Taking care with the surface that the child is sitting on and ensuring that there is nothing in the back pockets of pants, etc.
- Regular checking of heels and ankles etc. for red areas from splints
- Being careful that things like sand do not get into the splints. This has an abrasive effect.