The Quadriplegic Caregiver
Physical and Emotional Challenges

HEALTH TIPS TO A HEALTHIER YOU

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**Disclaimer:**

I have no medical training and recommend you talk to your primary care physician, or other doctor you feel comfortable with, about any information you gleam from this site. All health options and/or changes should be discussed with your doctor.

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This report may offer health, fitness and nutritional information and is designed for educational purposes only. You should not rely on this information as a substitute for, nor does it replace, professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

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A study conducted through the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation found that “there are nearly 1 in 50 people living with paralysis -- approximately 6 million people.” (1) That’s a lot of people. In fact, the study noted that the number of paralysis victims is equal to the populations of Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and Los Angeles combined. This means that there’s a likely possibility that you know someone who is living with some form of paralysis.

Many people don’t realize there’s a difference between paraplegia and quadriplegia. Another term for the latter is tetraplegia and it’s devastating for both the patient and her family.

The difference between these two forms of paralysis is enormous. According to Paraplegic-Online.com, paraplegia affects the lower portion of the body, usually the legs or trunk of the body. Quadriplegia involves both the legs and arms, and can progress to other body parts and organs, including bodily functions. (2)

Being responsible for giving care to a quadriplegic loved one, being the caregiver, takes its toll physically and emotionally.

Quadriplegia is usually a result of spinal cord or brain injuries, but there are other causes, such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease, and multiple sclerosis. The Spinal Injury Network explains that quadriplegia can have a number of functionality levels, depending on the location of the spinal injury. (3)

With an injury, the paralysis usually remains the same from the time of injury. But, with nerve diseases, such as the Multiple Sclerosis mentioned above, the damage can be progressive.

Caring for this type of infirmity takes more than some can provide. The caregiver must be physically and emotionally strong in order to give the care and support the patient will need. Other qualities that will be needed are endurance and patience, and the ability to know when to seek help and take a break.

So, what are some of the physical and emotional difficulties that you may be confronted with?
The Physical Aspect

Until it gets to the point where a patient can no longer be taken care of at home, there are a number of physical responsibilities the caregiver will need to attend to, such as lifting the patient from a chair or bed for eating, getting into a wheelchair, or other activity. The patient must also be rolled over periodically to avoid prolonged periods of lying on a particular side or body part. This is to reduce the possibility or severity of bedsores. Bedsores can become ulcerated and dangerous if they’re not properly care for and treated. The best medicine is prevention, as they are very difficult to cure in a quadriplegic patient.

Another physical duty the caregiver will need to provide is lifting and rolling the patient for bathing. And, the patient will need to have her limbs exercised regularly. Having a hospital bed and commode is a necessity; it will make both your lives a bit easier, and will definitely make the patient’s life more comfortable.

To take care of your loved one, you’ll need to learn the proper techniques and procedures to ensure your well-being and safety, as well as the patient’s. When caring for a quadriplegic loved one, it’s easy to hurt her or injure yourself, especially your back, so care is needed.

When I cared for my quadriplegic mother there weren’t online searches, and even as recent as a few years ago there wasn’t much information online about the physical duties of caring for a quadriplegic patient. If you need information, simply talk to the patient’s doctor and you can also join a support group that will be able to give you needed tips and guidance.

The Emotional Aspect

The emotional side of watching someone you love live with a quadriplegic illness or injury is, for the lack of a better word, unbearable. But, you can’t let it be unbearable because the patient needs you. Enduring the emotional aspect of this situation is much more difficult than the physical duties you’ll be called upon for.

The best thing you can do is seek help and support. Support groups and even the patience’s doctor will be able to help you learn coping strategies.

Unfortunately, with progress degenerative illnesses, like some forms of Multiple Sclerosis, the paralysis can move to the patient’s hearing, vision, speech, ability to eat, and even breathing. Obviously, at this point it’s not safe to have the patient at home; she’ll need the professional and specialized skills of a medical team.

As mentioned above, not everyone is cut out to being a caregiver to a quadriplegic loved one. In the event you find you can’t take on the battle, you should still become a part of a support group. Guilt is a common ingredient in the mix.
Finding Help

Obviously, there is much involved in caring for someone with quadriplegia and one great resource available is The National Spinal Cord Injury Association (http://www.spinalcord.org). This organization offers New Beginning, a nationwide initiative. The program provides a new tool, the BackPack, which gives those with spinal cord injuries or disorders “information and consumer resources on mobility and medical equipment, disability benefits, accessible housing, leisure and travel, healthcare, and much more.” (4)

You can also do an online search using the term “quadriplegic care.” You’ll find a lot of links to websites that offer information. But, it’s always best to get information and support from recognized and valid sources, such as The National Spinal Cord Injury Association, and even the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation (http://www.christopherreeve.org).

Other resources you might look into:

American Spinal Cord Association
2020 Peachtree Road, NW
Atlanta, Georgia, 30309-1402
Phone: 1-404-355-9772
Web Address: www.asia-spinalinjury.org

Paralyzed Veterans of American
801 Eighteenth Street NW
Washington, DC, 20006
Phone: 1-800-424-8200
Web Address: www.pva.org

National Multiple Sclerosis Society
www.nationalmssociety.org/

PubMed Health
Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig’s Disease)

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Sources:

(1) http://www.christopherreeve.org/site/c.mtKZKgMWKwG/b.5184189/k.5587/Paralysis_Facts__Figures.htm
(2) http://www.paraplegic-online.com/edefinition01.htm
(3) http://www.spinal-injury.net/quadriplegia.htm
(4) http://www.spinalcord.org/partners/backpack/

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Karen Cioffi is a multi-award-winning author, freelance/ghostwriter, editor, and online marketer.

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And, to get monthly health information please be sure to sign up for the Health Tips to a Healthier You newsletter: http://healthtipstoahalthieryou.com (top right sidebar).