

Autonomic Dysreflexia



This is a potentially life-threatening complication of spinal cord injury in individuals with injury at the neurological level of T6 or above. It is caused by painful stimuli below the level of injury causing the BP to rise.

Signs and Symptoms

- Elevated BP
- Altered heart rate
- Headache
- Blurred vision
- Nasal Congestion
- Feelings of apprehension
- Goosebumps (below level of injury)
- Sweating or flushing (above level of injury)

BP increase greater than 20mmHg from baseline in adults and greater than 15mmHg in children

Triggers for AD

- Bladder distension
- Constipation
- Skin damage
- Infections
- Menstruation
- Sexual activity
- Anything causing pain or discomfort below the level of injury is a potential trigger



Treatment

- Sit up (90 degrees)
- Loosen or remove tight clothing
- Check bladder and empty if needed
- Check bowel and empty if needed
- General inspection below the level of injury
- Once the trigger is removed, BP should return to normal
- If a trigger cannot be found, medication may be necessary to lower BP
- Nifedipine 250-500mcg/kg, max 10mg for children

Systolic BP parameters requiring medication

0-5 yrs	>	120 mmHg
6-12 yrs	>	130 mmHg
≥ 13yrs	>	140 mmHg
Adults	>	150mmHg

Always try to remove the cause before considering medication

Remember: Autonomic Dysreflexia is a medical emergency

This card is a guide produced for educational purposes. Consult a healthcare professional regarding specific concerns or treatment.