

The risk of malnutrition in patients with spinal cord injury during inpatient rehabilitation

Background: The risk of malnutrition is increased in patients with spinal cord injury (SCI). Studies show that about 50% of patients with a recent SCI are affected by malnutrition when they enter a rehabilitation institution. However, there is a lack of data in the course and at the end of initial rehabilitation, as well as missing knowledge about the factors, which promote such a risk.

Study Design: Retrospective, monocentric, longitudinal cohort study, substudy of the Swiss Spinal Cord Injury Cohort Study (SwiSCI).

Objectives: To assess the risk of malnutrition in individuals with a spinal cord injury three months post injury and at the end of inpatient rehabilitation. Additionally, to identify further factors, which promote a high risk for malnutrition in this population.

Setting: Swiss Paraplegic Centre Nottwil, inpatient rehabilitation

Methods: Using the data set of the SwiSCI study and additionally collected data from the patients medical records, individuals with a SCI were assessed for the risk of malnutrition using the Spinal Nutrition Screening Tool (SNST) at three months post injury and at discharge from initial inpatient rehabilitation. Further, the risk scores for different subgroups were calculated.

Results: Of the 252 participants included, 62% were at risk for malnutrition three months post injury and still 40% at discharge. Moderate to high risk was found in all age and body mass index (BMI) levels. A particularly high risk was identified in ventilated patients, those with pressure ulcers, pneumonia, and with needs to be fed.

Conclusions: The risk of malnutrition is widespread during inpatient rehabilitation, but also at discharge to home or to a follow-up institution. Ventilated persons and persons with pressure ulcers, pneumonia or with needs to be fed are clear risk groups and need special attention. Based on these findings and the known negative impact of malnutrition on clinical outcomes, the awareness of malnutrition should be increased in the SCI population. Therefore, a regular and standardized screening is highly recommended.

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