

# Automatic Dysreflexia

## EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

Automatic dysreflexia (AD) is a potentially life-threatening condition affecting individuals with a spinal cord injury. AD is an abnormal overreaction of the autonomic nervous system in response to an irritating stimulus below the level of the spinal cord injury. AD causes narrowing of the blood vessels and a sudden increase in blood pressure.

It is important to lower blood pressure by identifying and removing the stimuli. Bladder and bowel irritation are the most common causes of AD, including distension, urinary tract infection, blocked urinary catheter, bladder or kidney stones, constipation, and hemorrhoids. Other sources of discomfort, such as pressure areas on the skin, tight clothing or socks, ingrown toenails, and blisters, can also trigger a response.

## WARNING SIGNS

- Increased blood pressure
- Sudden onset headache
- Blurry vision
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating above level of injury
- Flushed face or red blotchy skin above level of injury
- Cold, clammy skin or goose bumps
- Nasal congestion
- Menstrual cramping
- Nausea
- Anxiety

## ESSENTIAL STEPS

1. Do not leave the student unattended.
2. Contact the school nurse/health room.
3. If blood pressure above \_\_\_\_\_, call 911.
4. Encourage the student to perform pressure releases, as able.
5. Reposition the student in an upright position and lower the legs to help reduce blood pressure.
6. Loosen any restricting items, including clothing, socks, and braces. For males, pressure on the scrotum may cause AD.
7. Relieve possible bladder distention (e.g., perform clean intermittent catheterization, check for kinks in indwelling catheter tubing).
8. Administer blood pressure medication per student's emergency care plan.
9. If the bladder is empty and symptoms have not subsided, check for fecal impaction.
10. Continue to monitor blood pressure every 3-5 minutes.
11. If blood pressure has not decreased after \_\_\_\_\_ minutes, call 911.