



How do Adults Aging with Physical Disabilities Deal with the Passage of Time?

Until now, very little research so far has considered the meaning of time for older adults aging with SCI. This research is important because:

- **Time is often taken for granted.** Institutions expect all people to have the same amount of time and to use it the same way. However, as time ages and changes the body, a person develops limitations for how their time can be used.
- Therefore, time should be seen more as a **privilege and a social resource**. It is an essential aspect of an individual's life, both in terms of daily activities and long-term aging. Time is even considered a **social determinant of health**, or a factor that influences a person's or a group's overall health.
- Racism and ableism can manifest as **lost time**, like being denied time to engage in activities that increase control over and improve health. This issue then contributes to **health inequalities** and shows how time is not distributed equally.

What Was Discovered?

In our society, the ability to use **time and money efficiently and profitably** are often valued over everything else. Those who can't use time efficiently and profitably are **devalued and marginalized**. When people are living at the margins of society, it can be hard for everyone else to see the difficulties they face.

People with SCI are often **marginalized** due to their inability to use time like the general population. Their **lost time** manifests in terms of physical impediments that take up more time to address, but also in terms of **lack of** equipment, caregivers, transportation, or other **resources** that could help them be a less-marginalized part of society.

People with SCI **age faster** than people without SCI, so time is a scarce resource for them. The process of aging may mean an uncertain future of decline in health and functioning. However, if people with SCI **remain vigilant** and accept the future with a **positive attitude**, they can mitigate the effects of time with care and prevention.

Aging and SCI (Spinal Cord Injury): a Brief Overview

Life expectancy for people with SCI has increased significantly through the years, from 18 months in the 1940s to now living into their 50s and 60s for adults injured at age 20.

However, while life expectancy has increased significantly through the decades, it remains shorter for persons with SCI.

This life expectancy gap is mostly due to the fact that adults with SCI age at an accelerated pace, as they are more likely to develop chronic and secondary health conditions at a younger age.





Call To Action

Health care and rehabilitation practitioners should recognize the challenges faced by their patients living with disabilities and be aware of the importance of listening to their needs with respect to aging.

SNAPSHOT INTO THE RESEARCH

Arbiters of Time: The Experience of Adults Aging with Spinal Cord Injury. *Journal of Ageing and Longevity*. (2023). DOI: 10.3390/jal3010005 PMID: 38529020 PMCID: PMC10961950. Lisa Reber, Nasya S W Tan, Michelle A Meade, Martin Forchheimer, Denise G Tate, Philippa Clarke.



Focus of the Paper

To discover how time affects people with disabilities and their aging process.

Findings

- **Time's Control of the Body:** The study participants said they were aware of and concerned about their future. In their eyes, time is an authority (arbiter) over their future, and it will bring accelerated aging and loss of physical function.
- **The Individual's Control Over Time:** However, some participants rejected the idea that they had no control over time and believed they could work to slow it down and slow the loss of physical

function. They structured their present to control their future.

- **Rejecting Time's Control:** Participants used "determination" and "follow through" to maintain their bodies and minds. Participants spoke about exercise, physical therapy, diet, and the importance of "staying consistent," having a "routine," and "keep[ing] up with everything," such as medical appointments and other activities.

Participants were not passively living their accelerated lives. **They actively fought to be in charge of their futures.**

The contents of this brief were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number 90RTHF0001). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this brief do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

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