Respiratory Health & Spinal Cord Injury

Today is Michelle’s birthday! She tries to blow out her candles, but cannot get enough air.

So she asks her friend for help.

You know what? Blow out these candles with me.

PHEW!

Michelle explains that respiratory muscle weakness and paralysis means the muscles that allow you to inhale oxygen into your lungs and exhale carbon dioxide no longer work or are too weak to work well, causing shortness of breath.

It looks like you’re wondering why that was hard for me?

Seeing her friend’s curiosity, Michelle explains that a spinal cord injury (SCI) can lead to respiratory muscle weakness and paralysis. This can make it hard to breathe.

Happy birthday, Michelle!
Michelle tells her friend that people with SCI who have respiratory problems may develop other health problems. These may include:

- **Bronchitis.** This is an infection in the tubes that lead to the lungs.
- **Pneumonia.** This is an infection of the air sacs in the lungs.
- **Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA).** This is a blockage of air flow in the back of your throat during sleep. OSA is associated with feeling sleepy and tired, depression, heart problems, and other issues.

Michelle then explains to her friend that during her rehab stay, she learned ways to actively help her lungs be as healthy as possible, including:

- **Do not smoke or vape.** Avoid secondhand smoke. Cigarette smoke or inhaling smoke or vapors from other sources can harm your health in many ways.
- **Avoid the buildup of mucus in the lungs.** A cough assist machine can help keep your lungs clear if your respiratory muscles are too weak to cough. An attendant or family member can also be taught to help you cough.

*Are you OK, dear?*
Drink plenty of water, especially if you have an infection, unless your healthcare provider has told you something different. Be active and keep a healthy weight. Being overweight may lead to lung problems.

Stay hydrated!

Now, let's have some cake!

Get a flu shot every year. There are also two different types of pneumonia shots that you should discuss with your health care provider. Stay away from people who may have the flu or a cold.

See you next year!

Michelle says that even when she tries her best to prevent respiratory problems, they can still happen. That's why she ALWAYS contacts her healthcare provider if she has signs of a respiratory infection or sleep apnea. She also sees her provider once a year for a check-up.

https://msktc.org/sci
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