

Wheelchair: Bad for the Bone

BY SHAWN DEAN



Name: Shawn Dean

Diagnosis: C6-7 Incomplete Quadriplegic

EasyStand Owned: EasyStand 5000

Current Standing Program: 4-5 times a week for up to 1 hour

Blog: <http://onemansaccess.blogspot.com>

My name is Shawn Dean, I live in Minneapolis and I am an attorney, disability consultant and disability advocate. I had a Spinal Cord Injury on July 12, 1996 when I was seventeen years old. I am now a C6-7 incomplete quadriplegic. I spent two and a half months in rehab at a local hospital and a few months at Craig Hospital in Denver, Colorado. There I began standing a few times a week. I recently started a Minnesota Spinal Cord Injury Association, hoping it will be a full reference point for all people living with spinal cord injuries as they go from newly injured through later on in life. I enjoy writing so I started a personal blog last June where I mostly write about SCI specific things, and I'm a guest writer for the EasyStand Blog. I've also been working on writing an autobiography about my life's experiences since my diving accident.



“My rehab team suggested I get a stander for home therapy. I started standing more out of self-motivation than anything!”



“Of course, frequent standing on an EasyStand stander helps slow the bone density loss as well. That is why I am glad that I have stood as frequently as I have over the past almost seven years now!”

MY DIAGNOSIS

I had a diving accident at a beach. I approached the water like any other person going for a swim in the lake: I ran out until the water got so high up on my thighs that I couldn't run anymore and then I dove head first into the water. But I dove hard as a result of my swim team training and where I dove was shallower than expected. So the combined impact instantly broke my neck causing damage from the C-5 to C-7 levels. I was diagnosed a C-7 quadriplegic, paralyzed from the chest down. What's interesting is that I did a re-evaluation with a new rehab doctor last year and she diagnosed me a C-6 quad. After thirteen years of being a C-7 quad that flipped me out. So I now describe myself as a C-6/7 quad.

SELF MOTIVATED STANDING

In my case standing was not prescribed, I'm not sure how often therapists and physicians were prescribing standing back in 1996. But it was suggested by my therapists at Craig Hospital in Denver where I spent the last eight weeks of my post-SCI rehab stint. They had EasyStand standers and I stood in them a few times a week once my body had built up to that level of stability. My rehab team suggested I get a stander for home therapy. I started standing more out of self-motivation than anything!

STANDING HISTORY

The history of me and standing began in rehab. About six months after I moved back home, I got my stander and used it as much as I as I could, but it was pretty infrequent because I didn't really have an established home rehab program. With no PT's and the home health aids limited schedule there wasn't much time to stand.

TODAY'S STANDING ROUTINE

Then when I moved to Minneapolis and started law school I brought the stander up. I had PCAs in the morning and I established with them right away that standing was part of my morning routine. Get up, brush my teeth, wash my hair, and then right away break out the stander. I stand almost exclusively in the morning so I eat breakfast while watching TV. Usually I'm catching up on sports highlights on either SportsCenter or First Take on ESPN but it varies. I try to stand for at least a half hour but up to a full hour if I have time for it.

USING A TRANSFER BOARD

Being a quad, doing transfers with a transfer/slide board is the only way that I've ever done them. In terms of mechanics there's not much to it. I tuck it under my upper thigh (or have someone else tuck it for me) then slide over. My routine getting on the stander is tuck the board, move my feet as far to the sides of the wheelchair footrests as I can, then slide so my butt is mostly on the stander seat, then move my legs over a little more, then slide my butt all the way on the seat, then move my feet over one by one. After some slight adjustments I'm ready to stand up.

CHALLENGE: SLOW THE EFFECTS OF OSTEOPOROSIS ON THE BONES, AFTER SITTING IN A CHAIR FOR SEVERAL YEARS.

SOLUTION: REQUEST REGULAR BONE MINERAL DENSITY SCANS, PARTICIPATE IN A DAILY STANDING PROGRAM AND CONSIDER MEDICATION IF NECESSARY.

CHALLENGE: UTILIZE STANDER ON A DAILY BASIS, EVEN WITH LIMITED PCA SCHEDULE.

SOLUTION: COMMUNICATE IMPORTANCE OF STANDING WITH PCA'S & ALIGN STANDING TIME WITH PCA'S SCHEDULE

CHALLENGE: FIND A METHOD OF TRANSFERRING THAT WORKS WITH YOUR ABILITIES.

SOLUTION: TRY USING THE ASSISTANCE OF A TRANSFER/SLIDE BOARD TO MOVE FROM YOUR WHEELCHAIR TO A STANDING FRAME OR OTHER SURFACES.



“Being a quadriplegic means that by definition I lead a highly sedentary lifestyle, so like I said, I’m doing every thing I can to stay healthy.”



“Be proactive with your doctors about getting a BMD scan sooner than later.”

WANNA BE GYM RAT

I do everything that I can to stay healthy, which is hard to do when you’re a quad. At the very least I stand every other day (except weekends), work out in the fitness center at the Courage Center once a week, and use my hand bike every night. In addition, I’ve started eating a lot healthier the past few years. In part, it’s a higher fiber diet that supplements fruit and trail mix type stuff for other sugary snacks and junk food. I barely eat fast food anymore. I’m almost 32 now, but when I turned about 27 my metabolism (which used to be awesome) slowed way down. So the battle to stave off the vaunted “quad gut” gets fiercer by the year. Being a quadriplegic means that by definition I lead a highly sedentary lifestyle, so like I said, I’m doing everything I can to stay healthy.

STARTING NSCIA MINNESOTA CHAPTER

The Minnesota Spinal Cord Injury Association, or MNSCIA for short, is a nonprofit that I started along with two other good friends heavily involved in the greater Minneapolis disability community. Our mission is to enhance the lives of people who are impacted by spinal cord injury at all stages of their life. And by that we mean newly injured, in rehab, just discharged from rehab, years into the SCI lifestyle, and everything in between. We plan to be a comprehensive resource center that includes, but is not limited to, providing education about spinal cord injury; advocacy; outreach services and support; information about accessible technology and adaptive equipment; recreational opportunities and developments in rehabilitation and research.

ADVICE ON OSTEOPOROSIS AND SCI

If I could offer any advice it would be to suggest that people that have been living with SCI for more than, say, five or six years should start getting regular bone mineral density (BMD) scans. After thirteen years post SCI I had my first BMD scan last year and the results showed that I have severe osteoporosis in both my hips and lower spine. I now have the hips of a post-menopausal woman in her 80’s. It was shocking because I was only 30 at the time. I was told what brought it on was simply sitting in a wheelchair for over thirteen years. Not getting that regular weight on my joints weakened the integrity of my bones. Of course then I immediately thought of my infrequency of standing all of those years. In that instant I was immediately regretful.

I am now on a few medications designed to stave off the further deterioration process, and ultimately build back up some of that lost bone density, but I will be at high risk for hip fractures indefinitely. Although I couldn’t have avoided the osteoporosis path, because it is very common and inevitable with the SCI lifestyle, if I had a BMD scan years ago I could have caught this diagnosis before it became much more problematic. At no point in thirteen years did any doctor suggest that I get one so it’s frustrating in that regard. That’s why my advice is to be proactive with your doctors about getting a BMD scan sooner than later. Of course, frequent standing on an EasyStand stander helps slow the bone density loss as well. That is why I am glad that I have stood as frequently as I have over the past almost seven years now!

STANDING ROUTINE:
5 DAYS A WEEK
½ TO FULL HOUR

HOBBIES:
SPORTS
WRITING
WORKING OUT

PROFESSIONAL WORK:
MNSCIA PRESIDENT
ATTORNEY
DISABILITY CONSULTANT
ADVOCATE
BLOGGER

REHAB EQUIPMENT:
STANDING FRAME
TRANSFER BOARD
POWER CHAIR
HAND BIKE

