

It can happen to you.

I am almost totally fused and have been told repeatedly in the last year I have to be VERY CAREFUL. So listen up folks, this is not a concocted story, this is true nightmare and it can happen to you.

On Thursday, November 3, 2005, I was rear ended at a high speed and my neck was broken in several places. Due to someone's act of reckless driving my life is changed forever. It was completely out of my control to do anything to avoid it. They actually accelerated as they hit me. I cannot tell you how important it is to have someone with you when you are fused. I thought I had everything taken care of: card in the wallet, ICE# (In Case of Emergency) in cell phone - all worthless. If not for an off duty EMT (Angel), who came to my aid I would be totally paralyzed.

No one has any idea about this disease. There is a complete lack of even having heard of it. When you are stuck in a vehicle with a broken neck and you KNOW it is broken but you are trying to explain that you are fused

and the people around you don't understand what you mean, it is the most frightening thing I have experienced. After the accident, I had EMTs try and pull me out of my car - thank god they were stopped! In the hospital, an RN almost forced my neck down flat with the bed. I spent 8.5 hrs strapped to a board with a neck brace in the emergency room with no pain treatment. They finally did give me medication when I started convulsing. It is hard to imagine the pain you experience fused and broken being strapped to a board for that long.

The hospital I was taken to is in a small town. I had been told on a previous visit that I should not go there for treatment because the only experience they had with AS was me and they have no specialists. I had no way to convey this to EMTs. I was being

taken to the place where I couldn't be treated! After 8.5 hrs strapped to a board and another 1.5 hours in agony, I was transported to a level 1 trauma center and then my treatment began. I thought my AS pain was bad and things were difficult but now I know why I was told to be VERY CAREFUL. Sometimes it's just out of our control.

Have someone with you if you are fused or if you have to pin a note to your shirt. This is just the beginning of a long, LONG ordeal for me. I still have no idea what is going to happen. Surgery may not be an option and for now they can't even use a halo because the weight will split the other vertebrae.

Typed way too long,
Peace,
SCOTT THACKER

Update from Scott, January 9, 2006

It has been rough lately - very painful as it heals. My doctor thinks that, so far at least, my neck is healing without any problems, but I still have to go for more CT scans and x-rays. I may be able to start taking the neck brace off for periods of time in late February. It is amazing seeing the progress of the x-rays as my neck fuses. It is PROOF of how fast I initially fused and how viciously it happens. At the time of the accident I was getting ready to go down to Tampa to finish work on a CD/DVD for "Seasons Of The Wolf." I would have been doing a video for the song Nikhedonia that I wrote and received credit for the drum parts. The DVD is in a Rocumentary format, so I would have been doing some interviews and such. Needless to say it is depressing when I can't work, but I sill managed to play well enough to do all of this.

Subsequent to Scott's accident, we contacted Dr. Nortin Hadler who is a long term member of the SAA Medical and Scientific Advisory Board to find out if he could provide helpful information to Scott. Dr. Hadler responded immediately to our request:

This story sends shivers up my spine and I don't have spondylitis. It is the nightmare that has concerned me for decades. I, too, urge my patients to be "very careful" by which I mean avoiding shearing forces that are avoidable, eg choosing appropriate recreational activities. I even go out of my way to forewarn every anaesthesiologist who might be involved in the care of one of my patients with AS so that the neck is not accidentally hyperextended in the zeal to place a tube in the trachea. Then there's the specter of the unavoidable.

Perhaps AS patients should be wearing a Medical Alert bracelet with the phone number of their physician.

As for Thakman, I'm thankful it wasn't worse. He should take some heart. There is a chance the fractures will fuse spontaneously; it's the only setting where one may be advantaged by the pathophysiology of the disease. Perhaps, the drive to fuse the spine will kick in and fuse the fractures.

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Editor's note: we thank Scott "Thakman" Thacker for sharing his story and we send our very best wishes for optimum recovery. If you would like to follow his progress, log onto the SAA website general message boards at www.spondylitis.org and keyword search "thakman".