

Spinal Stenosis

When the spinal canal becomes too narrow

What is it?

Your spine is a collection of bones (vertebrae) stacked on top of each other. Down the middle, there is a hollow passage called the spinal canal. This is where the spinal cord lives, protected by the bones surrounding it.

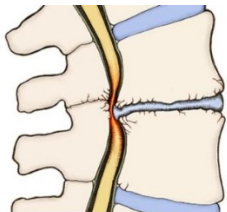
What is spinal stenosis?

“Stenosis” means narrowing. In this case, the spinal canal is narrowed and starts to press on the spinal cord. Spinal stenosis occurs most often in people over the age of 50. Men and women are affected equally.

What can cause spinal stenosis?

Spinal stenosis can be caused by conditions that affect the spine. These include:

- Arthritis
- Scoliosis (sideways-curved spine)
- Trauma to the spine
- Tumors or cysts
- Slipped disc



What will it do to me?

The spinal cord is a bundle of nerves supplying many parts of your body, including your arms, legs, bowel, and bladder. Depending on what part of the spine the stenosis is occurring at, you can experience different symptoms.

Possible symptoms:

- Discomfort while standing
- Pain in the arms or legs
- Numbness/tingling in the arms or legs
- Muscle weakness
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Sexual dysfunction

You may find it painful to stand straight upright, and it may seem more comfortable to stand leaning forward, like when using a shopping cart.



What can I do?

1. Staying physically active

It is important to stay physically active in order to promote spine mobility. This will not reverse spinal narrowing but may help with pain relief and maintaining your functional abilities. Things that you can do to keep your spine healthy include stretching, yoga, gentle exercise, physiotherapy, and massage therapy.

2. Pain medication

To alleviate pain in your back, arms, or legs, your doctor may advise you to take anti-inflammatory medications such as Ibuprofen (Advil) or Naproxen (Aleve). These can be over-the-counter or by prescription.

When pain is severe and constant, your doctor may suggest:

3. Spinal injections

Injections of steroids into the space around your spinal cord can help reduce inflammation and irritation of your spinal cord and nerves, which will reduce your symptoms.

4. Surgery


A surgeon may perform a laminectomy (decompression surgery) to open up space around your spinal cord.

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Patient-doctor learning area: Use this area to write down questions for your doctor or use it as a space for your doctor to answer your questions.



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