

Spinal Stenosis

A Common Cause of Leg Pain
After Age 50

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Condition Sheet

Spinal stenosis is a condition that typically develops very slowly as we get older, usually occurring after the age of 50. There are cases, however, where curvature of the spine (scoliosis) or congenital factors may lead to spinal stenosis in younger individuals. Slippage and misalignment of the vertebrae, known as spondylolisthesis, can also be a cause of spinal stenosis.

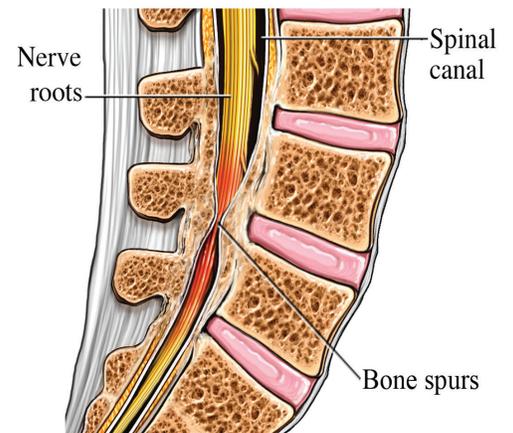
Spinal stenosis occurs with the gradual aging of the structures of the spine, leading to narrowing of the spinal column. The majority of cases of spinal stenosis occur in the lower or lumbar spine. The most common symptom of spinal stenosis is cramping or aching in the calves. As the condition advances, it becomes increasingly difficult to stand and walk due to the intensity of the resulting leg pain. If you suffer from the challenges of spinal stenosis, our network of pain management centers can help relieve your pain and return you to your previous activity level.

Understanding spinal stenosis

Spinal stenosis is a condition that occurs when the spinal canal narrows, resulting in pressure on the nerves in the spinal canal. The spinal canal is the channel within the vertebrae through which the spinal cord and spinal nerves run. While spinal stenosis can develop any place within the spinal column, it most often occurs in the lumbar (lower) spine and, to a lesser extent, the cervical spine (neck). The location and severity of spinal stenosis determines the type of symptoms you may develop and how it is treated.

Why spinal stenosis develops

Spinal stenosis is caused by the degeneration of bony and soft tissue structures that form and support the spinal column, including the discs, ligaments, and facet joints. These structures bear our weight and the stress of daily activities, such as twisting, lifting, sitting, standing, walking, and running. As we age, any one of the structures that make up our spinal column will be impacted by these daily stresses. For example, discs may bulge, ligaments may thicken, and facet joints may enlarge and develop growths called bone spurs. When



these changes occur, they cause pressure on the spinal nerves, resulting in inflammation and swelling.

The symptoms of spinal stenosis

The symptoms experienced from spinal stenosis vary depending on where the compression is located. The most common include:

- Cramping or aching in the calves (called neurogenic claudication) that impairs walking and is often confused with a circulation problem
- Tingling, numbness, or pain that radiates from the low back

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- into the buttocks and legs
- Neck or low back pain
 - Pain, numbness, tingling, or cramping in the arms
 - Weakness in the arms or legs

The degree of symptoms can range from mild to severe, with potentially debilitating effects. You may be comfortable sitting, but feel pain when standing. In general, pain is worse with backward bending of the spine and relieved by bending forward, such as leaning on a shopping cart.

The importance of accurate diagnosis

The type of pain that you may have with spinal stenosis can be similar to the symptoms of several types of disorders. Accurately determining the correct source of your pain is critical to successful treatment.

At our network of pain management centers, we begin diagnosis with a thorough clinical evaluation, including a complete medical history, analysis of your symptoms, and physical examination.

Testing may include x-rays, MRI and/or CT scans, and electrodiagnosis (EMG) to definitively pinpoint the source of pain.

Effective pain relief without surgery

The symptoms of spinal stenosis respond quite well to non-surgical therapy. In some cases, pain can be lessened or temporarily relieved with simple measures such as oral anti-inflammatory medications, physical therapy, and strengthening exercise programs. Typically, epidural corticosteroid injections known

as epidural nerve blocks* are needed to obtain longer lasting results. Using fluoroscopy (x-ray) guidance, the physician injects anti-inflammatory medication and anesthetic in the area of stenosis, relieving symptoms and maximizing your ability to function.

Epidural nerve blocks are performed at our network of pain management centers in a sterile environment on an outpatient basis. Proven to be safe and effective, this therapeutic procedure offers the benefit of alleviating your pain without surgery, without general anesthesia, and without hospital stays or long recovery periods.

**For more details, ask for an information sheet specific to this condition or procedure.*

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