

What Is Spinal Stenosis?

Spinal stenosis occurs when the channels through which your spinal cord and nerve roots travel become narrowed, thus squeezing the spinal cord and nerve roots. Doctors often call this squeezing "compression." Spinal stenosis can lead to pain in your lower back, legs, neck, arms, or hands, depending on *where* in your spine your spinal cord and/or nerves are getting squeezed. Spinal stenosis can happen anywhere in your spine, but it's most likely to happen in your low back (lumbar spine) or in your neck (cervical spine).

Symptoms of Spinal Stenosis

To get the best treatment for your spinal stenosis, it's important to recognize and understand the symptoms. Since spinal stenosis can gradually develop as you age, the symptoms can also gradually develop—and gradually worsen. Also, symptoms can vary a great deal. You may have no symptoms at all, since narrowing of the spinal canal or other channels does not always compress the spinal cord or nerves. However, when your spinal cord or nerve roots become compressed, you will feel it.

Spinal stenosis in your lumbar spine can cause pain or cramping in your legs when you stand for long periods of time or when you walk. The discomfort usually eases if you bend forward or sit down, but comes back when you stand upright. Pain that eases when you bend forward is typical of lumbar spinal stenosis. This type of pain may be called neurogenic intermittent claudication.

Other symptoms of lumbar spinal stenosis may include numbness, weakness, or tingling in the leg or foot. In severe cases of lumbar spinal stenosis, nerves to the bladder or bowel may become compressed, which can lead to partial or complete incontinence.

Spinal stenosis in your cervical spine can cause pain in the neck and shoulders. It may radiate down your arm or hand. Cervical spinal stenosis can also cause headaches, numbness, or muscle weakness. It can also affect the nerves that control your balance, which can lead to clumsiness or a tendency to fall. The pain from cervical spinal stenosis may be occasional or chronic, and it can range from mild to severe.

Treatment for Spinal Stenosis

The treatment depends on the causative factors. If the stenosis is primarily due to osteoarthritis, the treatment will differ greatly from stenosis caused by a disc bulge or herniation. It is very important to accurately identify the cause before treatment is initiated in order to have optimal results. Testing for stenosis involves a thorough examination and, in some cases, x-rays or an MRI.

From my experience, many cases of spinal stenosis respond more favorably when a multidisciplinary approach is taken. A qualified chiropractor can significantly improve the function of the spinal joints, while at the same time a medical doctor can address the biochemical inflammatory components. When chiropractic physicians and medical physicians work together, the patient benefits.

If you or someone you know is suffering from spinal stenosis and have not found the relief for which you are looking, please contact our office. We may be able to help you.

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