



# Lumbar Spinal Stenosis



## What is lumbar spinal stenosis?

Spinal stenosis is a term used to describe a narrowing of the spinal canal that gives rise to low back and leg pain. It is quite a common problem particularly with older people and is usually caused by the natural aging process of the spine. It can also affect younger people but this is less common. Leg pain related to lumbar spinal stenosis typically occurs when walking. Most find that sitting down or leaning forward enables them to recover so that they can then walk again. Classically, walking is more comfortable when pushing a shopping trolley.

## Warning signs

Lumbar spinal stenosis is not usually a cause for concern. However, if you have severe pain, which gets worse over several weeks, or if you are unwell for example have a fever, you should contact your doctor or call NHS 111. If you have a new onset of any of the symptoms below you should see your doctor or attend A&E immediately as this can be a sign of a more serious problem:

- Loss of feeling/pins and needles between your inner thighs, genitals or back passage.
- Altered feeling when using toilet paper to wipe yourself or during sexual intercourse.
- Increasing difficulty when you try to urinate
- Increasing difficulty when you try to stop or control your flow of urine
- Loss of sensation when you pass urine.
- Leaking urine or recent need to use pads
- Not knowing when your bladder is either full or empty
- Inability to stop a bowel movement or leaking
- Loss of sensation when you pass a bowel motion
- Change in ability to achieve an erection or ejaculate or loss of sensation in genitals during sexual intercourse

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## **Prognosis**

The course of lumbar spinal stenosis has some uncertainty, but a general rule can be applied that 1 in 5 will improve with time, 3 in 5 will stay the same and 1 in 5 will worsen with time. Worsening is usually that the walking distance will reduce gradually.

## **How to manage the symptoms of lumbar spinal stenosis**

### **Pain Relief**

- Simple pain killers can be used to help manage your pain. Ask your local pharmacist for advice. Please follow the instructions on the packet carefully.
- Your GP can prescribe stronger medication or nerve pain modifying drugs if required.

### **Keep Active as Able**

- A walking stick can often help make walking more comfortable. In more severe cases, a four-wheeled walking frame with a seat can be very useful.
- Cycling (e.g. static exercise bike) and swimming are good forms of regular exercise if you feel safe to do them. They are usually comfortable for people with lumbar spinal stenosis.

### **Positions of Ease**

- Many people find that sitting down or bending forward (eg leaning on a wall) helps to ease their pain.
- Try and pace your walking. Most people find they can walk a certain distance before their leg pain comes on. Resting then eases the symptoms to allow you to continue.

### **Weight loss**

- If you are overweight, weight loss can help decrease the forces through your spine and thereby alleviate symptoms.

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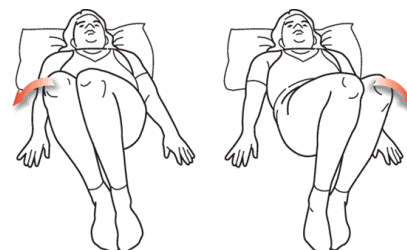


## Exercises

- Spinal mobility & stability exercises can be useful if performed regularly.

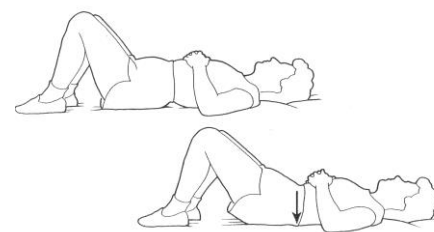
### Lumbar rotation

- Lying on your back, gently roll your knees side to side in a slow controlled way and as far as you feel comfortable to go. Repeat 10 times to each side.



### Pelvic Tilt

Lie flat on your back with your knees bent. Keep your feet, knees, hips and shoulders in line. Tilt your pelvis back by gently drawing in your stomach muscles and pressing your lower back (lumbar spine) onto the bed and hold for 10 seconds. Breathe normally throughout the exercise. This will strengthen your tummy muscles to help hold your spine in a better position when walking.



You could try holding this pelvis position to flatten the arch in your back while walking – it can alleviate symptoms in some cases.

If you find the exercises are making the pain worse stop doing them and speak to your GP or Physiotherapist.

### Other treatments

Spinal injections are not recommended by NICE guidance for most cases of spinal stenosis. Spinal surgery can be helpful in some cases but carries risks.

If you have tried the measures above and are still not finding your symptoms manageable, talk to your GP or physiotherapist about whether it may be useful to investigate these options.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Follow this link for more detailed information on lumbar spinal stenosis, including surgical options: <https://spinesurgeons.ac.uk/Spinal-Stenosis>

Below are the telephone numbers for the Community Outpatient Physiotherapy departments. Please call your local department for any further information/guidance;

Chippenham - 01249 456451  
Devizes - 01380 732520  
Malmesbury - 01666 827583  
Melksham - 01225 701027  
Salisbury - 01722 336262 Ext 4425/4413  
Savernake - 01672 517310  
Trowbridge – 01225 711341  
Warminster – 01985 22471

## **Safeguarding**

Wiltshire Health and Care has a strong commitment to care that is safe, of a high quality and that upholds our patients' rights. All our patients have the right to live lives free from abuse or neglect and, where they are able, to make or be supported to make informed decisions and choices about their treatment, care and support. Where patients are not able to make their own decisions, Wiltshire Health and Care staff are committed to ensuring that treatment, care and support is undertaken in accordance with the person's best interests. In order to fulfil these commitments, Wiltshire Health and Care follow the Safeguarding principles and responsibilities laid out in Sections 42-46 of the Care Act (2014) and are informed by, and apply, the guiding principles and provisions of the Mental Capacity Act (2005).

If you or your carer have any concerns about abuse, neglect or your rights in relation to care provided by Wiltshire Health and Care or any other agency or individual, please raise this directly with any Wiltshire Health and Care staff or contact the Safeguarding Adults Team by telephone on: 0300 4560111.

Regarding children, WHC is responsible for providing services in accordance with Section 11 of the Children's Act (1989) and works under the principles of Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018).

## **Wiltshire Health and Care Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 1237797 and [PALS.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net](mailto:PALS.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net)

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## Patient and Public Involvement

We value your opinions which will help us to further develop our services.

If you wish to provide feedback or get involved in our patient participation groups, please email the Patient and Public Involvement Officer at

[ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net](mailto:ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net) or telephone 01249 454386.

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