

Cervical Stenosis and Myelopathy

Patient Information

What are cervical stenosis and myelopathy?

Cervical stenosis is narrowing of the canal in your neck which contains the spinal cord. The term 'cervical' in this context refers to the cervical vertebrae which make up the neck. Cervical stenosis usually occurs as a result of age-related changes to the spine and is common, even in people with no symptoms. If the narrowing occurs to the extent that it causes pressure on the spinal cord, it can result in compression of the spinal cord which can affect its function. This is termed 'myelopathy'.

What are the symptoms?

Myelopathy can cause any of the following symptoms

- Numb, clumsy hands (pins and needles or a 'fizzing' feeling)
- A sensation of 'heaviness' in the legs
- Inability to walk at a faster pace
- Balance issues (such as unsteadiness and stumbling when walking or knocking into things – rather like if you were 'drunk')
- Difficulty with fine motor skills (such as handwriting or buttoning a shirt)
- Myelopathy is often not painful in itself but some people experience intermittent 'electric shock' type pains into the spine, arms and/or legs especially when bending their head forward. The age-related changes in the neck may also cause neck and/or arm pain.

There are a number of other conditions which can cause the symptoms above, so it is important to seek assessment from a healthcare professional, like a GP or specialist physiotherapist in order to determine the best course of action.

Working in partnership
Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
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How is cervical stenosis and myelopathy diagnosed?

Symptoms suggestive of myelopathy will need assessment by a spinal specialist in order to identify the condition. Physical examination can be helpful in this and MRI may be required to confirm diagnosis if myelopathy is suspected.

What is the prognosis?

Without medical intervention, symptoms of myelopathy may remain unchanged for years. However, difficulties with coordination may suddenly increase, without any way of predicting when this might happen. In severe cases myelopathy can cause paralysed arms and legs.

What treatment is available?

If you are confirmed to have myelopathy, surgical options are often considered in order to prevent worsening of symptoms. For further information about cervical stenosis, myelopathy and surgical intervention, please visit the British Association of Spinal Surgeons' website:

<https://spinesurgeons.ac.uk/resources/Documents/Booklets/FINAL-01382-19-Cervical-Stenosis-and-Myelopathy-Surgical-Options.pdf>

Further Information

More extensive information and support can be found on the following website:

<https://myelopathy.org/>

If you would like to seek the advice of a physiotherapist, there are a number of options within Wiltshire. Please speak to your GP practice about the ways you can be referred.

Alternatively, you can visit our website for further information on accessing our services;

<https://wiltshirehealthandcare.nhs.uk/physiotherapy/>

Other useful websites;

<https://www.activewiltshire.org.uk/>

Here you will find information on improving your activity level and details of what is available in your local area.

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/public-health-weight>

Here you will find information about weight management options in your local area.

Health improvement coaches - Wiltshire Council

Health Improvement Coaches work on a one to one basis to support behaviour change and improve health. They concentrate on behaviours associated with ill health including unhealthy eating often linked to obesity, stop or reduce smoking, sensible drinking, increasing physical activity, building confidence and motivation to change and boosting self-esteem, they also signpost and support clients to access other services and activities where appropriate.

Safeguarding

Wiltshire Health and Care (WHC) are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk of abuse, including victims and survivors of domestic abuse. We expect all WHC staff to share this commitment and promote safeguarding by implementing WHC policies and procedures, act promptly on concerns and share information appropriately.

If you or your carer have any concerns regarding a child or adult's safety, please phone Wiltshire Safeguarding Team on 0300 456 0111 (Adult) or 0300 456 0108 (Child) (9am – 5pm Monday - Friday) or please call 999 if you feel they are in immediate danger.

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 123 7797 and whc.pals@nhs.net

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 or telephone 01249 454386.