

Spinal Stenosis

WHAT IS SPINAL STENOSIS?

Spinal Stenosis is a narrowing of the spinal canal. There are many potential causes for spinal stenosis including aging, heredity, and changes in the blood flow to the lumbar spine. The most common cause of spinal stenosis is aging combined with osteoarthritis. Spurs may develop on the bones and into the spinal canal. With heredity, if the spinal canal is too small at birth, symptoms may show up in a relatively young person.

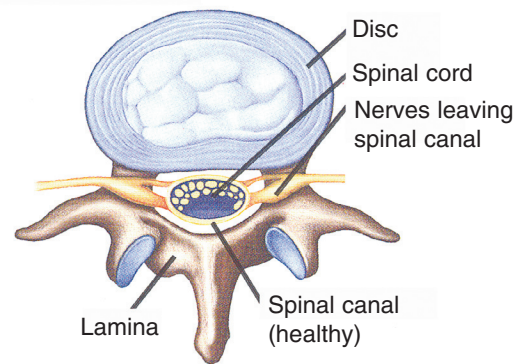
WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

When narrowing places pressure on the spinal cord or nerve roots, there may be a slow onset and progression of symptoms. You may feel pain and have difficulty when walking. Aggravated by activity, you may feel numbness, tingling, hot or cold feelings, weakness, or a heavy and tired feeling in the legs. People with more severe stenosis may experience abnormal bowel and bladder function, as well as foot disorders.

HOW IS SPINAL STENOSIS DIAGNOSED?

Your doctor may order one or more specialized tests to help confirm your diagnosis, rule out other problems, and pinpoint the source of your back pain.

Healthy Vertebra



X-rays show the general condition of your vertebrae (bones), and are very helpful in determining the cause of pain. Although x-rays cannot reveal a ruptured disc, for instance, they may reveal the bony spurs and narrowing of a disc space or the inside of the canal, which can be an indication of trouble in that area of the spine.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scans and Computerized Tomography (CT) scans produce detailed computer images of soft tissue and bones and are used to reveal the relationship between the nerves and the bony structure of the spine. MRIs are especially beneficial for the study of soft tissue abnormalities such as disc degeneration, protrusion, or rupture.

CT scans give a cross-section view of the spine and can show a bulging or ruptured disc.

Electromyography (EMGs) and nerve conduction tests measure the electrical activity of your muscles' contractions. They detect nerve or muscle irritation. Information from these tests help to locate the specific vertebrae and spinal nerves involved, allowing a diagnosis and an appropriate treatment program.

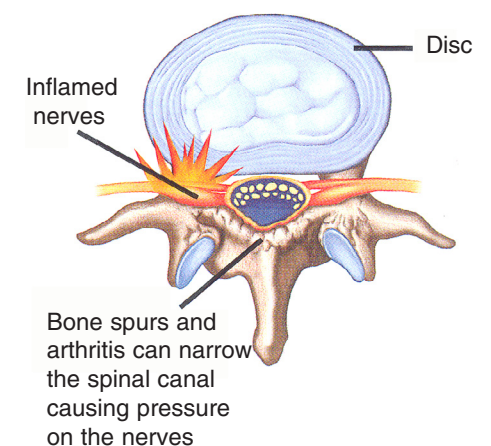
Bone scans can reveal abnormal bone activity.

WHAT TREATMENTS ARE AVAILABLE?

Anti-inflammatory medications, taken by mouth, are the first line of treatment. If symptoms persist, a more specific and potent anti-inflammatory medication (a cortisone-like drug) can be injected into the site of irritation. This is done by a procedure called Epidural Steroid Injection (ESI). People with spinal stenosis may also find changing their posture can offer some relief of pain. Flexing the spine by leaning forward while walking and lying with the knees drawn up to the chest may make it easier for stenosis sufferers to walk longer distances. Losing weight can also help relieve some of the load on the spine.

WHAT IS EPIDURAL STEROID INJECTION (ESI)?

ESI is a procedure in which a cortisone-like drug is injected into the spinal canal. These cortisone compounds are potent anti-inflammatory agents that deliver medication directly to the inflamed area. ESI is an outpatient procedure. The procedure causes little discomfort, and the risk of complication is very low. A local anesthetic is used to numb a small area in the lower back. A needle is then placed through the skin into the epidural space, an area adjacent to the affected nerves. The medication is painlessly injected through the needle and spread to the nerves.



WHAT CAN PHYSICAL THERAPY OFFER?

The first priority with physical therapy is to relieve your pain. The second is to prevent the pain from recurring. We will teach you special exercises and postures that will open up your spinal canal. We will also teach how to avoid positions that may narrow your canal. If the muscles are tight and weak, aquatic exercise may first be necessary so that posture exercises will be effective. Exercising in water reduces the effect of gravity and allows you to move freely. A program of individually tailored exercises can be developed for use at home.

IS SURGERY HELPFUL FOR SPINAL STENOSIS?

When symptoms return repeatedly because of severe pressure on the nerves, surgery to relieve the pressure on the affected nerves or spinal cord may be recommended. Removal of the obstruction that has caused the symptoms usually gives patients some relief. Many patients have less leg pain and are able to walk better following surgery.

Roper Neuro, Stroke & Spine Center

Roper Hospital
316 Calhoun Street
Charleston, SC 29401

For more information, call
(843) 723-8967

 **ROPER
HOSPITAL**
Neuro, Stroke & Spine Center
www.rsfh.com

ROPER ST. FRANCIS HEALTHCARE

Spinal Stenosis

Questions & Answers



 **ROPER
HOSPITAL**
Neuro, Stroke & Spine Center