



Points To Remember About Spinal Stenosis

- Spinal stenosis happens when the spaces in the spine narrow and create pressure on the spinal cord and nerve roots. The narrowing usually occurs over time.
- Depending on the location of the spinal stenosis, symptoms can include pain, numbness, and weakness in your legs, feet, arms, and hands.
- Treatments for spinal stenosis can include nonsurgical treatments such as physical therapy, medications to help manage pain, and, in some cases, surgery.
- To help you live with spinal stenosis, get regular exercise, change activities in your routine that cause pain, maintain a healthy weight, and don't smoke.

What is spinal stenosis?

Spinal stenosis happens when the spaces in the spine narrow and create pressure on the spinal cord and nerve roots. The spinal cord is a bundle of nerves that comes out of the base of the brain and runs down the center of the spine. The nerve roots branch out from the cord. In spinal stenosis, the narrowing usually occurs over time.

Who gets spinal stenosis?

Anyone can get spinal stenosis; however, your chances of developing the disorder go up as you age. Spinal stenosis also can happen in younger people who are born with a narrow spinal canal or who have an injury to the spine.

What are the symptoms of spinal stenosis?

Symptoms of spinal stenosis happen when the spaces within the spine narrow and put pressure on the spine. This occurs most often in the lower back and neck. For most people, symptoms develop slowly, and some people may not have any symptoms.

Symptoms of spinal stenosis in the lower back can include:

- Pain in the lower back.

- Burning pain or ache that spreads down the buttocks and into the legs, that typically worsens with standing or walking and gets better with leaning forward.
- Numbness, tingling, or cramping in the legs and feet. These may get worse when you stand or walk.
- Weakness in the legs and feet.

Symptoms of spinal stenosis in the neck may include:

- Neck pain.
- Numbness or tingling that spreads down the arms into the hands.
- Weakness in a hand, arm, or fingers.

What causes spinal stenosis?

Aging and age-related changes in the spine, injury, other diseases, or inherited conditions can cause narrowing of the spaces.

- Aging and age-related changes in the spine happen over time and slowly cause spinal stenosis. They are the most common causes of spinal stenosis.
- Arthritis is also a common cause of spinal stenosis. Two forms of arthritis that may affect the spine are [osteoarthritis](#) and [rheumatoid arthritis](#).
- Other conditions such as tumors of the spine, fractures from injury or other medical conditions, and [Paget's disease of bone](#) may also cause spinal stenosis.

Is there a test for spinal stenosis?

Doctors use a variety of tools to see if you have spinal stenosis and rule out other conditions, including:

- Medical and family history, which helps to determine if an injury, aging, or an underlying condition is causing your symptoms.
- Physical exam, which may check how you move and walk, when your pain happens, muscle strength in your arms and legs, and your balance.
- Imaging tests such as x-rays, MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), and computerized tomography (CT) scans.

How is spinal stenosis treated?

Doctors treat spinal stenosis with different options such as:

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Nonsurgical treatments, such as physical therapy, a brace to provide support, acupuncture, and adjustments of the spine or massage of the muscles by trained health care providers, may relieve pain.

- Medications to help manage pain and inflammation.
- Surgery, depending on your symptoms, how you respond to other treatments, and your overall health.

Who treats spinal stenosis?

Doctors who can provide treatment of spinal stenosis may be:

- Family or primary care doctors.
- Neurologists, who treat disorders and diseases of the spine, brain, and nerves.
- Neurosurgeons, who perform surgery for disorders and diseases of spine, brain, and nerves.
- Orthopaedists, who treat and perform surgery for bone and joint diseases.
- Pain specialists, who are physicians including anesthesiologists with specialized training in evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of different types of pain.
- Psychiatrists, who specialize in physical and rehabilitation medicine.
- Physical therapists, who specialize in movement and strengthening muscles.
- Rheumatologists, who specialize in treating musculoskeletal diseases and autoimmune disorders.

Living with spinal stenosis

The following self-care tips can help you manage and live with spinal stenosis:

- Get regular exercise. Try to exercise at least three times a week for 30 minutes. Avoid doing things that can make the pain worse. Your health care provider or physical therapist may recommend specific exercises for you to do at home as well. Talk to your doctor before beginning any exercise program.
- Change your daily routines that might cause pain. Pace activities so you don't overdo it.
- Use assistive devices, such as a cane or walker, to help you safely move around.
- Try changing your posture. Some people may find that moving the spine into different positions can relieve some of their symptoms.
- Practice healthy habits. For example, maintain a healthy weight and if you smoke, quit.

For more info

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