

Spinal Cord Compression

When Cancer Spreads to Bone

Spinal Cord Compression

Cancer can stay in one part of the body, or it can spread to different areas such as bone. It can sometimes end up in the bones of the spine.

A tumour growing in the bones of the spine can sometimes start to press on the spinal cord (the nerve structure in your back). This condition is called **spinal cord compression**.

When spinal cord compression happens, a person may have a number of symptoms. The possible symptoms are listed below.

It is very important that you do not ignore the symptoms of spinal cord compression. Early detection and treatment are extremely important. The earlier this condition is treated, the more likely it is that the symptoms of spinal cord compression will be avoided or relieved.

What are the symptoms?

Pain in your back

This pain can be anywhere in your back, from your neck down to your tailbone. The pain may get worse when you move or when you lie flat. A lot of people who have cancer have pain, but you want to be especially careful if you have back pain that:

- is different than your regular pain,
- is new or is constant.
- becomes more severe.
- wraps around the body like a belt.

Numbness/tingling sensation

A common symptom of spinal cord compression is pins and needles in your legs or arms and/or a loss of feeling in your legs or arms. It is also possible to lose feeling in your groin area or trunk.

What are your questions? Please ask.

We are here to help you.

Muscle weakness

Muscle weakness may be hard to notice but common signs of muscle weakness are:

- Your legs or arms feel heavy, like they are weighed down with something.
- You can't walk across a room or up a flight of stairs as well as you could before.
- You are tripping, dragging your feet or falling.
- You can't grasp things with a firm grip and lift them up.

Bladder or bowel problems

Another sign of spinal cord compression may be difficulty in passing urine (pee). It can be difficult to start the flow of urine (pee) or you could go long periods of time without urinating (peeing). Spinal cord compression can cause a loss of feeling of bladder or bowel fullness and have bathroom "accidents".

Problems Walking

Severe or prolonged spinal cord compression may cause problems including difficulty walking or paralysis (unable to move) that can be permanent. This is the main reason why it is so important to notice the signs and symptoms of spinal cord compression and to seek medical treatment **right away**.

How can spinal cord compression be treated?

There are many different ways to treat spinal cord compression, and **early treatment is very important**. The most common treatment is a combination of steroids and radiation therapy. The goal of the treatment is to shrink the tumour or to stop it from getting bigger and relieve the pressure on your spinal cord. Sometimes surgery and chemotherapy are options. Your cancer doctor will discuss with you what choices are available to you.

If you have any questions about spinal cord compression, or think you may have the symptoms of cord compression, you should contact your doctor immediately or go to the closest Emergency Room.

Looking for more health information?

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For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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*Prepared by: Nova Scotia Cancer Care Program
Approved by: NSCCP Patient Education Committee
Designed by: Nova Scotia Cancer Care Program Staff*

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