



Lumbar Spinal Stenosis

Physiotherapy Service

This leaflet explains what **Lumbar spinal stenosis** is and gives advice on what to do about it.

Where is it felt?

Lumbar spinal stenosis symptoms can include **pain, aching, cramping, burning, tingling like pins and needles, numbness and or a heaviness feeling into one or both legs.** Some people may feel weaker in their leg and feet muscles, and some may have low back pain as well as leg symptoms.

How could it affect me?

The symptoms can often be felt more with **walking and standing** and usually **gets better when you sit down or bend forward.** The leg symptoms can often be more bothersome than low back pain.

The symptoms may come and go. It is common for symptoms to feel worse for a while after a particular activity. Lumbar spinal stenosis can affect our ability to carry out daily activities including work and hobbies. At times the pain can feel severe and for some be ongoing. This can affect our general well-being and mental health.

Why does it happen?

Lumbar spinal stenosis is the narrowing of the space in the parts of the lower back spine where the nerves pass through. The most common causes for narrowing are the age related or degenerative changes to bones, joints, discs and ligaments of the spine. Due to a variety of reasons, some spines age in different ways to others. This can result in some people feeling more or different symptoms to others. At times these changes can contribute to compression and sensitivity of the nerves, resulting in leg symptoms.

Lumbar spinal stenosis is more common in people 50 years old or older.

The severity and impact of symptoms is often due to a combination of:

- How we are made (muscles, joints and nerves)
- What we think (thoughts and feelings)
- How fit and healthy we are
- How we move
- What activities we do
- How we do our activities

Is it serious?

Based on the information you have provided, your physiotherapist believes you have Lumbar spinal stenosis that is **not** a medical concern. Low back pain related leg symptoms can sometimes be a sign of other medical conditions. In most cases x-rays are not advised for lumbar spinal stenosis. Scans are only useful in a small number of people with specific signs and symptoms.

If you are not improving or getting worse despite following the advice given, please contact us again.

Will it get better?

Some people will see an improvement in a flare up of low back pain and lumbar spinal stenosis symptoms in the first 2 to 8 weeks. It can take 3 to 12 months before many feel they are getting back to normal and some people describe ongoing problems.

It is important to understand that to recover we must build back up our physical and mental health as best as we can. This can reduce the chance of having long-standing back and back related leg problems. Even though the body and spine is aging it still requires the right amount of activity, exercise and mental stimulation to use it well.

What can I do to help myself?

Continue to carry out the self-help advice on **managing your pain, modifying your activities** and gradually **building up your physical and mental health**. Introduce the further advice and exercises you receive from your physiotherapist. Exercises cause your body to adapt to activity. It's a gradual process. For them to work you will need to stick with them.

Consider the factors affecting your situation and work towards improving them.

- Learn more about low back pain and spinal stenosis
- Consider other pain medication options with a Pharmacist or GP
- Improve physical fitness through activity and exercise. Using an exercise bike or bicycle is often a good form of exercise to try with lumbar spinal stenosis (see your exercise sheet)
- Improve your lifestyle (weight, smoking, alcohol, activity, stress)

- Improve your mental health and well-being

What can be done to help me?

Further physiotherapy assessment and treatment may be necessary if you have followed the advice given and it has not helped. Being actively involved in your health and well-being is still the most important part of your management.

There is a good chance that you will improve if you follow the advice you have been given. If you are not improving despite following the advice, please contact us again for further support.

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg