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Health

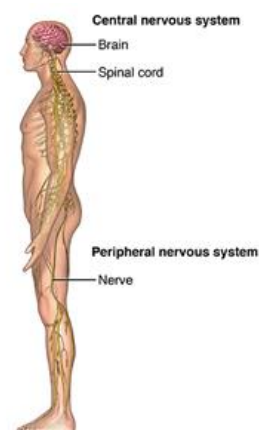
[\(/health\)](#)

Spinal Cord Compression

◆ Back and Neck Pain ([/health/conditions-and-diseases/back-pain](#)) ◆ Orthopedics ([/health/treatment-tests-and-therapies/orthopedics](#))
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What is spinal cord compression?

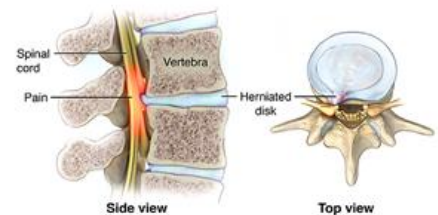
Spinal cord compression is caused by any condition that puts pressure on your spinal cord. Your spinal cord is the bundle of nerves that carries messages back and forth from your brain to your muscles and other soft tissues. As your spinal cord travels down your back, it is protected by a stack of backbones called vertebrae. They also hold your body upright. The nerves of your spinal cord run through the openings between the vertebrae and out to your muscles.



Spinal cord compression can occur anywhere from your neck (cervical spine) down to your lower back (lumbar spine). Symptoms include numbness, pain, and weakness. Depending on the cause of the compression, symptoms may develop suddenly or gradually, and they may require anything from supportive care to emergency surgery.

What causes spinal cord compression?

One of the most common causes of spinal cord compression is the gradual wear and tear on the bones of the spine, known as osteoarthritis. People who develop spinal cord compression from this are usually older than 50.



Other conditions that may cause spinal cord compression can develop more quickly, even very suddenly, and can occur at any age:

- Abnormal spine alignment (scoliosis)
- Injury to the spine
- Spinal tumor
- Certain bone diseases
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Infection

What are the symptoms of spinal cord compression?

Symptoms of spinal cord compression can develop quickly or slowly, depending on the cause. Injuries may cause immediate symptoms. Tumors or infections may cause symptoms that develop over days or weeks. Wear and tear of the spine may take years to cause symptoms.

These are common symptoms:

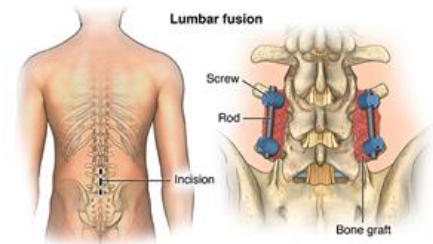
- Pain and stiffness in the neck, back, or lower back
- Burning pain that spreads to the arms, buttocks, or down into the legs (sciatica)

Spinal Fusion | Richard's Story

After living with back pain for years and not having any positive results from prior care, U.S. Army veteran Richard Shetter sought a second opinion from the Johns Hopkins orthopaedic spine division.

[Learn more about Richard's care at Johns Hopkins \(/orthopaedic-surgery/patient-information/patient-stories/spinal-fusion-richard-story.html\).](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/orthopaedic-surgery/patient-information/patient-stories/spinal-fusion-richard-story.html)





Some other treatments that may be helpful for some people include acupuncture and chiropractic care.

Can spinal cord compression be prevented?

Many causes of spinal cord compression can't be prevented. You can help prevent symptoms of spinal cord compression caused by gradual wear and tear by keeping your back as strong and healthy as possible.

- Get regular exercise. Exercise strengthens the muscles that support your back and helps keep your spine flexible.
- Maintain good posture and learn how to safely lift heavy objects. Other good body mechanics include sleeping on a firm mattress and sitting in a chair that supports the natural curves of your back.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Excess weight puts more stress on your back and can contribute to developing symptoms of spinal compression.

How is spinal cord compression managed?

The best way to manage spinal cord compression is to learn as much as you can about your condition, work closely with your healthcare providers and caregivers, and take an active role in your treatment.

Keep your back as healthy as possible by maintaining a healthy weight, practicing good body mechanics, and getting regular exercise.

Simple home remedies like an ice bag, heating pad, massage, or a long hot shower can help reduce pain.

The nutritional supplements glucosamine and chondroitin have been recommended as nutritional supplements for people with osteoarthritis, but recent studies have been disappointing. Ask your health care provider if he or she recommends any supplements for you and always discuss any alternative treatments or medicines you'd like to try.

Your thoughts matter to us. Join our community today.

Johns Hopkins Medicine Virtual Advisors (Virtual Advisors) is a group of individuals who share their insights about the Johns Hopkins care experience. One to two times per month, Virtual Advisors receive a link to short, interactive surveys. All responses are confidential.

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