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Spinal Stenosis

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Fast Facts

- Spinal stenosis is usually the result of osteoarthritis, which can cause a pinching of the spinal cord or nerve roots. Anyone over the age of 50 is at risk.
- Medical history is key to making a diagnosis. The impact of this disease varies widely from patient to patient.
- There is no cure for this disease but there are steps you can take to reduce pain and improve your flexibility (your ability to bend and move about).
- Exercise is very important in the treatment of this disease. Exercising regularly to keep muscles strong and improve flexibility boosts strength, reduces pain and improves general well-being.
- Your choice of treatment depends on how severely spinal stenosis affects your quality of life.

Spinal stenosis (or narrowing) is a common condition that occurs when the small spinal canal, which contains the nerve roots and spinal cord, becomes compressed. This causes a “pinching” of the spinal cord and/or nerve roots, which leads to pain, cramping, weakness or numbness. Depending on where the narrowing takes place, you may feel these symptoms in the lower back and legs, neck, shoulder or arms.

Usually, the narrowing is caused by [osteoarthritis](#), or “wear and tear” arthritis, of the spinal column and discs between the

vertebrae (the bones of the back). It may also be caused by a thickening of the ligaments in the back, as well as by a bulging of the discs that separate the vertebrae. Symptoms of spinal stenosis often start slowly and get worse over time. Pain in the legs may become so severe that walking even short distances is unbearable. Frequently, sufferers must sit or lean forward over a grocery cart, countertop or walker to temporarily ease pain.

☐ What is spinal stenosis?

☐ What causes spinal stenosis and who does it affect?

☐ How is spinal stenosis diagnosed?

☐ How is spinal stenosis treated?

☐ Living with spinal stenosis

☐ The rheumatologist's role in treating spinal stenosis

Updated March 2019 by Ali Duarte, MD, and reviewed by the American College of Rheumatology Committee on Communications and Marketing.

This information is provided for general education only. Individuals should consult a qualified health care provider for professional medical advice, diagnosis and treatment of a medical or health condition.

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