

Spinal Stenosis II. Symptoms and Treatment

Last week we tried to explain what spinal stenosis "looks like" from an anatomy standpoint so you could understand it is much more complicated than the typical bad back.

Symptoms from spinal stenosis caused by the wear and tear arthritis changes that we are talking about come on slowly and sneak up over time.

Over many months or years the patient may experience aching, burning, tingling and cramping in the buttocks, thighs and sometimes the lower legs.

Pain may radiate from buttocks to lower legs. Pain in the back may not be a big problem.

Spinal stenosis or bad circulation?

Spinal stenosis

Walking and leaning forward may relieve pain
Walking and pushing a shopping cart relieves pain
Standing and leaning forward relieves pain
Symptoms improve lying on your side, curled up
Symptoms are worse standing upright or lying flat on your back

Bad Circulation

Pain with walking is relieved by stopping or standing still
Pain with walking starts in the calf muscles and radiates upward
You don't feel leg pain lying flat on your back or walking slowly

Non-surgical Treatment

Many people with mild or moderate spinal stenosis on MRI study get long term pain relief with---

1. Physical therapy may include stretching and strengthening exercises, posture and body mechanics training.
2. Weight loss
3. Familiar pain relieving drugs like Advil. Prescriptions may include Elavil, Pamelor, Neurontin, Lyrica.
4. Steroids injected into the spinal canal can help some patients greatly.

Surgery

The goal is to decompress or enlarge the constricted area of the spine. This is called laminectomy and it removes a portion of the bone on the back part of the spinal canal.

This procedure decompresses nerves and may allow you to walk or stand without pain. It generally does not relieve back pain from arthritis.

In a small percentage of cases if the spine is unstable I may need to add spinal fusion which connects 2 or more bones in the spine to make it more solid.

Laser surgery and implantable braces are unproven and have not shown long term success.

I always reserve surgery for patients who have not responded to conservative treatment or for those with more severe signs and symptoms impacting quality of life.

All Orthopaedic Surgery problems can be evaluated by Dr. Haverbush at the Lakeview Community Wellness Center in Lakeview or at the office in Alma at 315 Warwick Dr., Alma, Michigan.

Please call 989-463-6092 for information or to schedule an appointment.

Future Lakeview Community Wellness Center Clinic dates are September 19 and October 3. Please don't forget there is a wealth of accurate information about Spinal Stenosis and all the other Orthopaedic conditions I treat on the office teaching website www.orthopodsurgeon.com. Please log on and check it out.

We are happy to answer questions from readers. You can e-mail me at orthopodsurgeon@hotmail.com or write to me at 315 Warwick Dr., Alma, Michigan 48801.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush