

THE SPINAL COLUMN

By the Spine Care Institute of San Francisco

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Clinical Presentation of Lumbar Spinal Stenosis



Extension when walking provokes the symptoms.



Patients lean forward to walk more comfortably



Sitting relieves the symptoms.

What is Spinal Stenosis?

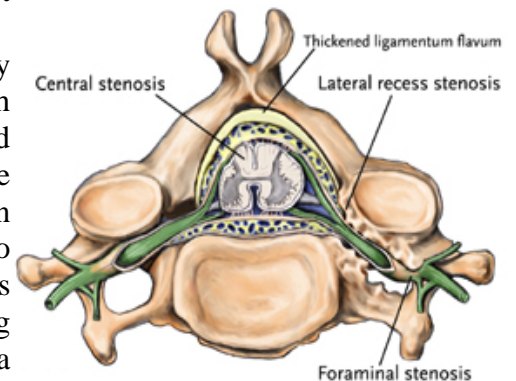
Spinal stenosis is the narrowing of the spinal canal. The narrowing is caused by a combination of the disc bulging into the spinal canal, the ligamentum flavum thickening and the facet joints enlarging. All of these structures contribute to the narrowing of the spinal canal, which compresses the spinal cord, causing pain.

Spinal stenosis is common; 21% of people older than 60 will have spinal stenosis. However, the majority of people will not be symptomatic.

The typical medical history of a patient presenting with symptomatic stenosis is a mild backache for many years. The patient will then develop pain in the buttocks and eventually into the leg. When walking, pain is relieved if the patient is leaning forward, such as when pushing a

shopping cart. When sleeping, people usually prefer to curl in a side position. These walking and sleeping postures enlarge the spinal canal, relieving the pressure on the nerve roots. For this same reason, the pain that a patient feels with spinal stenosis is typically relieved when sitting.

For an evaluation, call our New Patient Coordinator at (415)-353-6661



What are some of the treatments for Spinal Stenosis?

Conservative care is effective in most patients with spinal stenosis. Conservative care should emphasize anti-inflammatory medications and physical therapy with exercises to strengthen the core muscles. If that treatment does not resolve the problem, then epidural injections can be tried.

The epidural injection is done with x-ray assistance to place the medicine exactly on the nerve root that has the greatest amount of pressure. Studies

have shown that the use of epidurals can reduce the need for surgery 50% of the time.

If conservative care is not effective, there are new minimally invasive surgical procedures that are much less invasive than what has been previously available.

Overall, spinal stenosis is a very treatable condition which usually has a good outcome with improvement of the patient's condition.