

Malignant Spinal Cord Compression

Oncology Service

Information for patients at risk of developing malignant spinal cord compression



Introduction

This leaflet has been given to you so that you know what to look out for and what to do in case your cancer affects you in this way. Malignant spinal cord compression is an emergency, and you will need to contact your doctor immediately if you experience the symptoms described in this leaflet.

What is malignant spinal cord compression?

Malignant spinal cord compression (MSCC) occurs when cancer cells grow in or near to the spine, and press on the spinal cord and nerves. This results in swelling and a reduction in the blood supply to the spinal cord and nerve roots. The symptoms of spinal cord compression are caused by the increasing pressure (compression) on the spinal cord and nerves.

Any type of cancer can spread to the bones of the spine, which may lead to spinal cord compression. However, it is more commonly seen in people with cancers of the breast, lung or prostate, and people who have lymphoma or myeloma.

Remember, MSCC only occurs in a small number of people.

What should I look out for?

If your doctor has told you that you are at risk of MSCC, or you think you might be, then let your doctor know immediately if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Back pain anywhere from your neck downwards. The first symptom is usually any unexplained back pain, which may be mild to begin with, but lasts for more than one or two weeks. The pain may

feel like a 'band' around the chest or abdomen, and can sometimes radiate over the lower back, into the buttocks or legs

- Numbness or 'pins and needles' in toes and fingers, or over the buttocks
- Feeling unsteady on your feet, having difficulty with walking, or your legs giving way
- Problems passing urine (these may include difficulty controlling your bladder, passing very little urine, or passing none at all)
- Constipation or problems controlling your bowels
- Back pain made worse by coughing, sneezing or straining
- Back pain which stops you from sleeping

These symptoms can also be caused by a number of other conditions. It is very important to let your doctor know if you have any of these symptoms so that they can be investigated.

The earlier MSCC is diagnosed, the better the chances of the treatment being effective.

What should I do?

If you have any of the symptoms described in this leaflet, you must tell your doctor immediately.

Further information/advice

Macmillan Cancer Support /
Cancerbackup www.macmillan.org.uk

0808 808 2020

Brain and Spine Foundation
www.brainandspine.org.uk

0808 8081000

NICE guidance www.nice.org.uk

NICE publications 0845 003 7783

Concerns and Queries

If you have any concerns / queries about any of the services offered by the Trust, in the first instance, please speak to the person providing your care.

For Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital

Alternatively you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01472) 875403 or at the PALS office which is situated near the main entrance.

For Scunthorpe General Hospital

Alternatively you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01724) 290132 or at the PALS office which is situated on C Floor.

Alternatively you can email:

nlg-tr.PALS@nhs.net

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Scartho Road
Grimsby
01472 874111

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