

Cauda Equina Syndrome

CES

You have been given this leaflet because you may have or be at risk of Cauda Equina Syndrome.

It is very important that you read and understand this information.

What is Cauda Equina Syndrome (CES)?:

The spinal cord extends from the brain down through a canal inside the vertebral column. At each level of the spine nerves branch off from your spinal cord (nerve roots) and are responsible for sending signals to and from the muscles and other structures throughout your body. The spinal cord finishes just above your waist, below this is a group of nerves called the Cauda Equina. The nerves of the Cauda Equina supply the muscles that control your bladder, bowel and legs.

Cauda Equina Syndrome (CES) is the symptoms that occur when the nerves of the Cauda Equina are compressed.

Cause:

Numerous causes of CES have been reported, the most common being, a very large disc prolapse or spinal stenosis (a narrow spinal canal). Less common causes include tumours, infection, or trauma. CES is rare and mainly occurs in adults but can occur at any age.

Symptoms:

Cauda Equina Syndrome (CES) is a rare, but serious spinal condition and needs immediate medical assessment and treatment. CES presents as one or a combination of symptoms. Most commonly these symptoms develop suddenly and may become rapidly worse, within hours or days. However, some people develop symptoms gradually. If you experience any of the following symptoms it could be sign of CES and you should seek immediate medical advice.

Saddle Anaesthesia

Loss of feeling between the legs
Numbness in or around the back passage and / or genitals
Inability to feel the toilet paper when wiping

Bladder Disturbance

Inability to urinate (pass water)
Difficulty starting to urinate (urinary hesitancy)
Loss of sensation when you pass urine
Inability to stop or control urination (incontinence)
Loss of the full bladder sensation

Bowel Disturbance

Inability to stop a bowel movement (incontinence)
Constipation
Loss of sensation when passing a bowel motion

Sexual Problems

Inability to achieve an erection or ejaculate (males)
Loss of sensation during intercourse

Nerve Root Pain

It is quite likely that you will have a combination of back pain, leg pain, leg numbness or weakness. These symptoms however are also common in people who have back problems but do not have CES.

If you suddenly develop any of the above symptoms then it is strongly recommended that you contact your GP to request an urgent appointment or attend Accident and Emergency department urgently

Diagnosis:

Initially diagnosis of CES is made from the information that you tell the clinician who assesses you. The examination findings are useful as they give an indication of how urgently the problem needs treatment.

In CES there may be a problem with your ability to feel a pin prick around your buttocks, genitals and/or back passage. The strength of the muscle which controls the back passage may be reduced. Like patients with nerve root pain you may also have changes to the sensation of your legs, strength of leg muscles or reduced reflexes.

Investigations:

After examination if CES is suspected, the clinician may send you for a spinal scan (MRI). The scan will confirm or rule out the condition and demonstrate which level of the spine is involved. The scan also helps the clinician to plan appropriate treatment and decide on the clinical urgency.

Treatment:

If CES is confirmed on the scan, urgent spinal surgery is indicated, to prevent permanent damage to the nerves which supply the bladder and bowel.

Prognosis:

How well people do after spinal surgery for CES depends on the cause, how severe the symptoms were and how long they had the symptoms before the operation.

In people who had badly affected bladder and bowel control before surgery, the recovery is often incomplete, and sexual difficulties may persist.

