

Cauda Equina Syndrome

Introduction

You have been given this leaflet because your clinician thinks that you could be at a risk of developing Cauda Equina Syndrome. This leaflet will give you information about Cauda Equina Syndrome, signs and symptoms and how to get treatment. A member of the team will discuss everything in the leaflet with you, but if you have any questions, please let us know.

What is Cauda Equina Syndrome?

The Cauda Equina is formed by nerve roots at the bottom of your spine. These nerves can be compressed by injury or degenerative changes and you may then develop new symptoms. If you develop cauda equina syndrome immediate referral for investigation and treatment is required to prevent permanent damage to the nerves.

This is a very rare condition affecting approximately 1% of people who experience low back pain. Though it is very rare, it is important that you are aware of the symptoms.

Delay in seeking medical attention may result in serious and irreversible complications such as permanent loss of bladder or bowel control.

What are the signs and symptoms of Cauda Equina Syndrome?

Patients with Cauda Equina Syndrome may experience one or more of the following symptoms.

- **Saddle anaesthesia**

This is a loss of feeling between the legs, numbness in or around the back passage and/or genitals and an inability to feel the toilet paper when wiping.

- **Bladder disturbance**

These symptoms could include an inability to urinate (pass water), difficulty initiating urination (urinary hesitancy), loss of sensation when you pass urine, inability to stop or control urination (incontinence), or loss of the full bladder sensation.

- **Bowel disturbance**

These symptoms could include an inability to stop a bowel movement (incontinence) or, loss of sensation when passing a bowel motion.

- **Sexual problems**

These symptoms could include an inability to achieve an erection or ejaculate in males or loss of sensation during intercourse.

Most commonly these symptoms develop suddenly and may worsen rapidly, within hours or days. However some people develop symptoms gradually.

What should I do if I have any of these symptoms?

Cauda Equina Syndrome is a rare but serious spinal condition. It needs immediate medical examination and treatment.

If you suddenly develop any of the above symptoms then it is strongly recommended that you urgently contact your GP or attend your local Accident and Emergency department.

Where can I get further information?

Further information can be found on the following websites:

NHS choices at www.nhs.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.londonspine.co.uk

General Trust information

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS is a confidential service for people who would like information, help or advice about the services provided by any of our hospitals. Please call 020 8869 5118 between 9.30am and 4.30pm or e-mail LNWH-tr.PALS@nhs.net

Please note that this service does not provide clinical advice so please contact the relevant department directly to discuss any concerns or queries about your upcoming test, examination or operation.

If you would like this information in an easy to read format, large print, braille, different format or language, please contact the PALS team on 020 8869 5118 or email lnwh-tr.PALS@nhs.net We will do our best to meet your needs.