



Acute Oncology Service

Patients With Cancer Who Are At Risk Of Developing Cord Compression

An Information Leaflet

Spinal Cord Compression

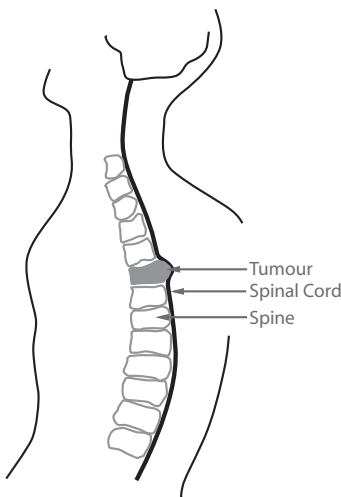
What to look out for

If you have a type of cancer that has spread to a bone, you need to know about spinal cord compression and the warning signs.

If you can recognise these early warning signs and get treated quickly, permanent damage may be avoided. The aim of this leaflet is to explain what to look out for, and what you should do if you have any warning signs.

What is spinal cord compression?

The spinal cord is a bundle of nerves that runs from the brain down the back. It is surrounded by the bones of the spine. The spinal cord provides nerves to the body including the bladder, arms and legs. If you have a tumour in the bones of the spine (vertebrae) or in the tissues around the spinal cord, it can cause pressure (compression) on the spinal cord. This can cause pain, altered sensation and weakness.



Spinal cord compression is not common and the risk of cord compression is small even if you have a secondary cancer in the spine.

What are the warning signs?

This depends on which part of the spine is affected. Pain may be present for some time before other symptoms develop. The warning signs can be any of the following:

- Pain in one area of your spine that is severe, distressing or different from your usual pain.
- Pain down your leg or arm.
- Tingling – like electric shocks – down your spine into your legs, or arms and legs.
- Severe pain in your spine which changes when you lie down or stand up, lift or strain, wakes you at night, or stops you getting to sleep.
- Pain which starts in the spine and goes around the chest or abdomen.
- New pain which gets worse and does not respond to pain relief medication.
- Stiffness and heaviness in your legs affecting your balance and walking.
- Numbness or changed sensation in your legs – this can also affect your lower body, chest or arms, weakness in your legs, or arms and legs.
- Bladder/bowel problems – loss of control (incontinence) or not being able to empty your bladder.

What should I do if I develop any warning signs?

Get advice immediately: Contact the hospital team where you usually go for your cancer follow up clinics, your GP or Macmillan nurse or even your local A & E. Describe your symptoms and explain that you are worried that you may have spinal cord compression and that you need to be seen urgently. Don't delay. Ring someone today even if it is at a weekend or a holiday period.

What happens next?

- A doctor needs to examine you. If the doctor suspects that you may have spinal cord compression he will advise you to stay flat in bed and a scan of your spine will be arranged urgently. This is usually an MRI scan, but you may have a different scan if this is not suitable for you.
- The doctor will prescribe steroids (dexamethasone) for you before or after the scan. Steroids reduce pressure and swelling around nerve tissue. If you are diabetic, or have had problems with steroids in the past, you should tell your doctor.
- Radiotherapy, surgery or chemotherapy are all options for treatment. Your oncology team will discuss the best treatment for you with the specialist surgeons. This treatment option depends on the type of cancer, which part of the spine is affected and your general health. In any case, treatment should be started as soon as possible after the scan.
- If you have cord compression you will probably be admitted to your local hospital. You may need to be transferred to The Christie for radiotherapy or Salford Royal if you need surgery. You will have to stay flat in bed until the doctors are satisfied that your spine is stable and it is safe to start walking again. You will get help with this from the physiotherapist. If your neck or top of the (cervical) spine is affected, you will also need to wear a collar to prevent damage to the spinal cord.

Spinal cord compression, if untreated or if there is a delay in treatment, can lead to permanent damage and even paralysis. Early diagnosis and treatment gives the best chance of preventing paralysis.

Remember to get help if you develop any warning signs. Seek immediate help if you have unexplained tingling, numbness or weakness in your arms and legs.

Who to contact?

Get advice immediately: contact the hospital team where you usually go for your cancer follow up clinics via their emergency contact number, (some are listed below).

You could also contact your GP or Macmillan nurse but if there is any delay please attend your local A & E.

Describe your symptoms and explain that you are worried that you may have spinal cord compression and that you need to be seen urgently. Don't delay. Ring someone today even if it is at a weekend or a holiday period.

Christie Hotline service on **0161 446 3658**

MRI Haematology helpline on **0161 901 0406**

We would like to acknowledge The Christie NHS Foundation Trust who wrote the original version of this leaflet.

Notes

[illegible]

Zero Tolerance Policy

We are committed to the well-being and safety of our patients and of our staff. Please treat other patients and staff with the courtesy and respect that you expect to receive. Verbal abuse, harassment and physical violence are unacceptable and will lead to prosecutions.

Suggestions, Concerns and Complaints

If you would like to provide feedback you can:

- Ask to speak to the ward or department manager.
- Write to us: Patient Advice and Liaison Services, 1st Floor, Cobbett House, Manchester Royal Infirmary, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9WL
- Log onto the NHS Choices website www.nhs.uk - click on 'Comments'.

If you would like to discuss a concern or make a complaint:

- Ask to speak to the ward or department manager – they may be able to help straight away.
- Contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) – Tel: 0161 276 8686 e-mail: pals@cmft.nhs.uk. Ask for our information leaflet.

We welcome your feedback so we can continue to improve our services.

No Smoking Policy

The NHS has a responsibility for the nation's health.

Protect yourself, patients, visitors and staff by adhering to our no smoking policy. Smoking is not permitted within any of our hospital buildings or grounds.

The Manchester Stop Smoking Service can be contacted on
Tel: (0161) 205 5998 (www.stopsmokingmanchester.co.uk).

Translation and Interpretation Service

These translations say "If you require an interpreter, or translation, please ask a member of our staff to arrange it for you." The languages translated, in order, are: Arabic, Urdu, Bengali, Polish, Somali and simplified Chinese.

اذا كنت بحاجة الى مترجم، او ترجمة، من فضلك اطلب من احد موظفينا ترتيب ذلك لك

اگر آپ کو ایک مترجم، یا ترجمہ کی ضرورت ہے، تو برائے کرم ہمارے عملے کے کسی رکن سے کہیں کہ وہ آپ کے لیے اس کا انتظام کرے۔

আপনার যদি একজন দোভাষী, অথবা অনুবাদের প্রয়োজন হয়, দয়া করে আমাদের একজন কর্মীকে বলুন আপনার জন্য ইহা ব্যবস্থা করতে।

Jeśli Pan/Pani potrzebuje tłumacza lub tłumaczenie prosimy w tym celu zwrócić się do członka personelu.

Haddii aad u baahantahay tarjubaan, fadlan waydii qof ka mid ah shaqaalahayga si uu kuugu.

如果你需要翻译或翻译员, 请要求我们的员工为你安排



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