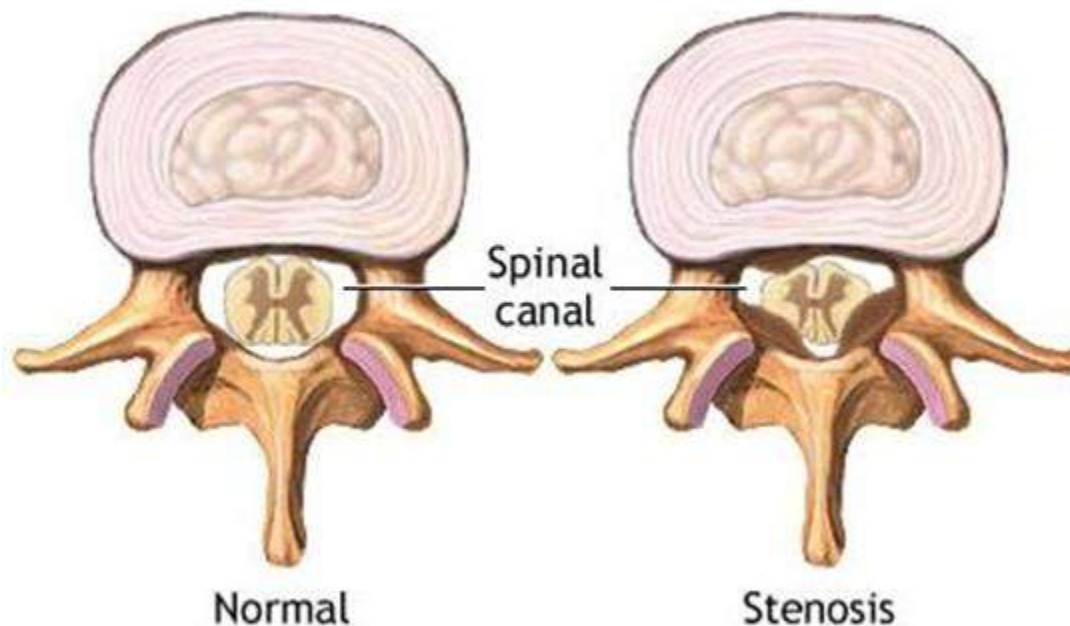


Spinal Canal Stenosis – What is it? Brightside December, 2017

By Dr. Derek Conte

Spinal canal stenosis is a condition where the spinal canal which houses the spinal cord is narrowed. Stenosis literally means “to narrow, or constrict”. Stenosis, therefore is not restricted to conditions of the spine but of any passageway in the body, such as an intestinal stricture blocking food as in pyloric stenosis, or a valve of the heart as in aortic stenosis.

Spinal stenosis is a narrowing of the spinal canal



(Note the closure of the central spinal canal on the left side)

Spinal canal stenosis can be caused by bulging discs encroaching on the central canal or lateral recesses which convey the individual nerve roots. A tumor can also take up space in the canal and exert pressure on the spinal cord and nerves. Stenosis can be caused by trauma. Example: falling off a horse onto the tailbone, hyper-extending the low back injuring the ligamentum flavum which can swell and calcify. Another cause is spondylolisthesis, in which the bones become “loose”, losing their alignment and begin to shear and compress the spinal cord.

Still another possible cause of canal stenosis is achondroplastic dwarfism --- a condition where the long bones of the body have lost their ability to lengthen normally, shortening the spinal pedicles and restricting the opening of the canal.

Spinal canal stenosis can occur in the cervical, but most often in the lumbar area of the spine and the symptoms can be mild to severe and range from being asymptomatic to having debilitating pain,

burning, paresthesia, numbness and loss of function of the muscles and, in emergency cases, loss of bowel or bladder control.

Spinal canal stenosis may be diagnosed with conventional X-Ray, MRI, and CT scan, with each technique revealing different features and information. Typical medical treatment begins with pain relievers, anti-inflammatories in conjunction with physical therapy and progresses to steroids and finally, surgery. The typical surgery done is called a laminectomy, where the “roof” of the spine is removed thus relieving the pressure on the cord.

Exercise is also of benefit, as can be acupuncture. Traction and specific chiropractic adjustments can help alignment and reduce symptoms, even dramatically so.

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