

What is “spinal stenosis?”

Spinal stenosis is a very common condition that leads to pinching of the nerves in the lower lumbar spine. It is the result of the progressive wear and tear of the spine that leads to a decrease in the diameter of the spinal canal and subsequent pressure on the nerves in that canal. It is caused by bulging discs, herniated discs, bone spurs, thickening of the ligaments and other changes in the structure of the bones.



The MRI above demonstrates severe spinal stenosis in between the L4 and L5 bones. Note that there is no white fluid (space) around the nerves at that level. In fact, there is no space around the nerves and they are completely “pinched!”

Is lumbar “spinal stenosis” dangerous?

Progressive lumbar spinal stenosis that occurs in most patients is not dangerous in the sense that it will not cause paralysis. It can, however, be quite painful. As it increases in severity, a patient’s ability to stand or walk any significant distance diminishes as they began experiencing back pain &/or leg “heaviness” (pain, numbness, tingling, burning, etc). Patients with spinal stenosis generally feel better by leaning forward when they walk or stand with most patients reporting that they have to lean on a grocery cart to be able to navigate around a grocery store. Very rarely does lumbar spinal stenosis pose a risk for permanent nerve injury (loss of leg, bowel or bladder function) and is generally not a concern.

How is lumbar spinal stenosis treated?

Because the condition is not life threatening or poses a risk for paralysis, it is treated symptomatically. Treatment options include:

1. Medications as needed (Ibuprofen, Naprosyn, Tylenol, etc.) for pain
2. Physical Therapy- good for general conditioning and stretching
3. Epidural Injections- “cortisone” injections in the spine
4. Laminectomy- relieves pressure on the nerves by removing bone and ligaments
5. X-STOP Spacer- creates space for the nerves without removing bone
6. XLIF- creates space for the nerves without removing bone and helps “straighten” and stabilize the spine if there is any deformity, instability or scoliosis

