

Lumbar Spinal Stenosis

What is Spinal Stenosis?

The spinal cord and nerves that travel to the arms and legs all pass through the spinal canal. Narrowing of the spinal canal is a common finding, particularly in older patients, but some people may suffer with symptoms as a result. The symptoms will depend on where the narrowing is happening. In the low back, stenosis can cause symptoms in the legs and feet, including pain, numbness, tingling and weakness.

In particular, some people may notice these leg symptoms when walking or standing. It can make walking longer distances difficult, although symptoms usually ease after a few minutes of sitting down. Also, you may note that bending forward eases the symptoms in your legs.

How is it diagnosed?

Spinal stenosis is usually diagnosed by your GP, physiotherapist or advanced practitioner based on your symptoms and a physical examination.

X-rays and MRI scans are not done routinely for spinal stenosis. In some cases, an MRI scan may be used if there is a concern that further treatment is needed, for example an injection or operation.

How can physiotherapy help?

Physiotherapy and weight loss are two of the most important things you can do to help the symptoms of spinal stenosis.

Regular exercises can help to:

1. Increase the mobility in the spine.
2. Strengthen the muscles around the hip to help with walking and standing.
3. Stretch the muscles at the front of thigh to improve posture and mobility.

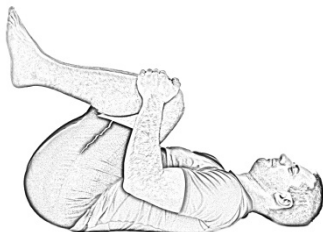
Exercises

These exercises are safe to try at home and should not increase your pain or symptoms. They may cause a muscular ache. You should aim to do them 1-2 times a day. Do not feel you need to do them all but try to do a few from each section every day.

Spinal Mobility

Remember: Perform the exercises slowly, Hold, relax and return to the starting position and repeat each x 10 - 20.

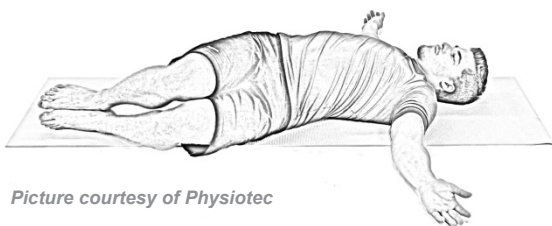
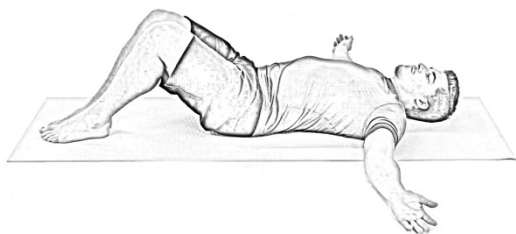
1. Knee Hugs



Picture courtesy of Physiotec

- Lying flat on your back, gently draw your tummy in towards your spine.
- Gently draw your knees up towards your chest, one at a time.
- Place your hands below your knees and gently pull them further towards your chest, to feel a greater stretch.

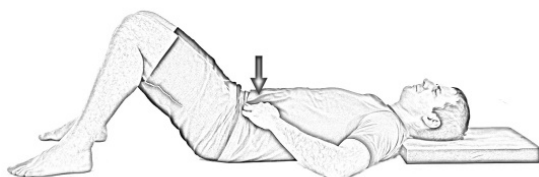
2. Knee Rolls



Picture courtesy of Physiotec

- Lying on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor or bed. Ensure your feet and knees are close together.
- Gently and slowly lower your knees towards your right / left hand side, as far as you feel comfortable.
- Alternate and perform in the opposite direction.

3. Pelvic Tilts



Picture courtesy of Physiotec

- Lying on your back, bend your knees to 90 degrees, your hips to 45 degrees and place your feet flat on the floor or bed. Ensure your feet and knees are hip distance apart.
- Imagine your pelvis is like a bucket of water. Tilt your pelvis backwards, pushing your back into the bed and slightly lifting your bottom, "tipping the water out of the bucket backwards".
- Hold, then relax and return to the starting position.
- Then tilt the opposite way, arching your back, "Tipping the water out of the bucket forwards".

Exercises to Strengthen the Buttocks.

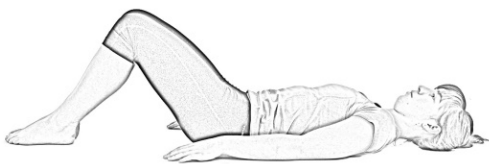
1. Sit to stand



Picture courtesy of Physiotec

- Find a supportive chair and place the back of the chair against the wall, to stop it moving when you sit.
- With your feet flat on the floor, knees bent to 90 degrees and hip distance apart. Sit up tall and gently draw your shoulder blades back and down.
- Place your hands across your chest or alternatively place your hands straight out in front of you. Avoid pushing up on your knees/ chair arms.
- Gently lean forward with your upper body, push through your feet and squeeze through your bum muscles to initiate the stand and straighten your knees. Stand tall with your feet hip distance apart.
- To return to the start position, bend your knees, push your bottom backwards towards the chair keeping a neutral spine.
- Repeat in a slow, controlled manner 5 - 10 times

1. Hip Bridges



Picture courtesy of Physiotec

- Lie on your back with your knees bent. Feet apart, as wide as your hips.
- Use your tummy muscles to push your low back gently in to the floor
- Squeeze your buttocks, ready to push the body upwards.
- If you are able, push your hips off the ground and hold for 5 seconds. If you can only manage to lift by an inch or so, that is fine. If you can, raise your pelvis until your trunk is aligned with your legs.
- Slowly return to the initial position and repeat. Repeat the whole exercise up to 10 times.

Exercises to Stretch the Leg Muscles

Hold for 30 – 60 seconds and repeat 2-3 times

1. Calf Stretch



Picture courtesy of Physiotec

- Standing tall with your feet hip distance apart, gently draw your tummy in towards your spine and draw your shoulder blades back and down. Place your hand on a chair or wall in front of you.
- Step one foot behind, keeping the toes pointing forwards and heel down. Ensure your knee is straight.
- Then bend the front knee leaning forwards towards the chair/ wall.
- Feel the stretch in the calf (the back of your lower leg)
- Repeat on both sides.

2. Hip stretch



Picture courtesy of Physiotec

- Standing tall with your feet hip distance apart, gently draw your tummy in towards your spine and draw your shoulder blades back and down. Place your hand on a chair or wall in front of you.
- Move your leg as far back as possible, without creating pain. Feel a stretch in the front of the hip.
- Make sure not to arch your back.
- Return the leg and repeat on the other side.

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MSK Physiotherapy Admin Office: 01484 905380

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

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