

Spinal stenosis: treatment options

Use this decision aid to help you and your healthcare professional talk about how best to treat spinal stenosis. This decision aid is for people diagnosed with spinal stenosis who have experienced leg weakness, numbness, or pain that worsens with standing and walking. It is not for people with loss of bowel and urine control due to pinched nerves in their lower back.

Frequently Asked Questions ↓	Managing without injections or surgery	Injections (epidural steroids)	Surgery
What does the treatment involve?	Being as active as possible to improve blood flow and taking medicine to relieve pain and swelling around the nerves.	Injection of a local anesthetic and steroid where the nerves are under pressure. This takes around 20 minutes.	A small piece of bone is removed to make a larger space for the nerve(s) in your back. This takes about 2 hours and most people spend 1-2 days in the hospital afterwards.
How soon will I feel better?	6 weeks after the problem starts, about 20 in every 100 people (20%) say they are better.	Studies have had mixed findings. At best, between 15 to 30 in every 100 people (15 to 30%) experience relief. Of those, most feel better in a week or so.	6 weeks after surgery, about 75 in every 100 people (75%) say they feel better.
Which treatment works best in the long-term?	4 years after treatment, about 48 in every 100 people (48%) who manage without surgery say they are better.	It is hard to say. Some studies have shown benefits from steroid injections but others have not.	4 years after surgery, around 59 in every 100 people (59%) say they are better.
What are the main risks/side effects?	The side effects will depend on which pain reliever you use.	Fewer than 1 in every 100 people (<1%) have problems, such as bleeding, headache, and infection.	2 in every 100 people (2%) will get an infection. 1 in every 100 people (1%) will get blood clots. Fewer than 1 in every 100 people (<1%) will get nerve damage.
How will this treatment impact my ability to care for myself?	You should go about your normal daily activities as much as you are able to.	You will need someone to drive you home after the injection. Most people resume regular activities the day after the injection.	Most people need some help from family and/or friends for 1-2 months following a simple operation. More complex operations require longer healing.
Will I need any other treatment?	No, but you may be asked to see a physical therapist to start an exercise program.	You should take pain relievers as needed and keep active. The injection may be repeated in the future, but usually no more than 2 or 3 times in total.	Most people use pain relievers after the operation. Some need physical therapy after their operation and 15 in every 100 people (15%) need a short stay in a nursing home. Longer term, 6 in every 100 people (6%) need more back operations within 1 year of surgery, 13 in every 100 (13%) within 4 years; and 25 in every 100 (25%) within 10 years.

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