



University Hospital
Southampton
NHS Foundation Trust

Spinal cord compression

Information for patients



Information for patients

Cancer can have an effect on your bones and increase your risk of experiencing pressure on your spinal cord (spinal cord compression) so it's important to be aware of the symptoms.

Recognising the signs

The most obvious sign to look out for is back pain, particularly experiencing back pain when you haven't previously or noticing changes to existing back pain. You may also experience one or more of the following:

- weakness, heaviness or stiffness in your limbs
- numbness or tingling/pins and needles
- changes in bowel and/or bladder function

Seeking advice

It's extremely important that you call us quickly if you experience any of the symptoms mentioned above. You may need to be assessed and **may** need hospital treatment. Any delay could impact on the effectiveness of the treatment you receive.

If you have any of the symptoms listed above, please call the acute oncology emergency phone line on: **023 8120 1345**.
This emergency phone line is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

What to do with this leaflet

Keep this leaflet safe. Should you ever be concerned that you may be developing signs of spinal cord compression, show it to the healthcare professionals treating you.

Further information

You can find further information on spinal cord compression at www.cancerresearchuk.org

Information for healthcare professionals

If you suspect this patient is at risk of developing spinal cord compression it's important you assess for:

- back pain
- sensory changes in the limbs
- muscle weakness
- gait unsteadiness
- hyper-areflexia
- urinary urgency, hesitancy, retention and/or incontinence
- bowel incontinence, constipation and/or reduced control

What to do next

(for the referring hospital, GP or clinical team)

- immediately start Dexamethasone 8mg IV or oral and a proton pump inhibitor
- place the patient on flat bed rest
- discuss these symptoms with the on-call registrar in clinical oncology on the day of presentation by calling the University Hospital Southampton (UHS) switchboard on **023 8077 722** and ask for the on-call registrar in clinical oncology
- carry out an MRI scan at the local hospital on the same day of presentation and if confirmed/impending, discuss with the on-call registrar in clinical oncology at Southampton General Hospital (SGH) and then discuss a transfer to SGH
- don't organise scans or x-rays before the MRI as this may cause unnecessary delays
- ensure that the patient is categorised as an emergency with a minimum wait for transfer to hospital

Contact

Call **023 8077 7222** and ask for the on-call registrar in clinical oncology.

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