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How do I know if I have low back nerve compression?

Nerve compression can be difficult to tell apart from other conditions, such as muscle strains and broken bones. If you have back pain that won't go away, it's important to see your doctor for diagnosis. Often, people with low back nerve compression experience a sharp burning pain that shoots down a leg. Numbness, tingling, and weakness in the leg may indicate more severe compression. Your doctor may use x-ray or MRI to diagnose you, but this is not always necessary. If you are losing control of bowel or bladder function, you need to seek medical attention immediately as you may have a more serious condition.



Figure 1: <http://compassindy.com/wp-content/uploads/back-pain1.jpg>



<http://blog.bioethics.net/spine.gif>

What is low back nerve compression?

Low back nerve compression is a painful condition that can occur from a variety of causes. The most common causes are

- Herniated disc - A nerve leaving the spinal cord gets compressed between two vertebrae
- Spinal stenosis - The spinal canal shrinks, squeezing the spinal cord itself.

Low back nerve compression can cause significant pain in the back and leg, as well as leg weakness, numbness, and tingling. Depending on the severity of compression, this condition can range from bothersome to completely debilitating.



Treatment for Low Back Nerve Compression

Front cover: http://backatitmassage.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/low_back_pain.jpg



Treatment

Low back nerve compression can be extremely painful and debilitating. Below you will find some of the treatment options that can help with this condition. Different options may work better for different people, so it's important to discuss these treatment options with your doctor.



<http://i.ehow.com/images/a04/ue/hd/prepare-injections-back-leg-pain-200X200.jpg>

Steroid Injection

“Conservative” Treatment

Conservative treatment is usually the first and most effective approach for treating low back nerve compression. This approach consists of rest, mild over-the-counter pain medications such as Tylenol® and ibuprofen, and heat and ice to the low back. When able, you exercise as tolerated with stretching and physical therapy. This approach usually has the best results and fastest recovery.

References:

Cuckler JM et al., Bernini PA, Wiesel SW et al. The use of epidural steroids in the treatment of lumbar radicular pain. *J Bone Joint Surg Am* 1985;67:63–66.

Karppinen J, Mlamivaara A, Kurunlahti M, et al. Periradicular infiltration for sciatica. A randomized controlled trial. *Spine* 2001;26:1059–1067.



<http://hillcountrydocs.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderpictures/surgeon.jpg>

Surgery

Surgery is the most drastic and costly treatment for low back nerve compression. It is usually used only after conservative treatment has been tried and is unsuccessful. Not all people will be eligible for surgery, but it may provide benefits for people who do not get relief from any other treatment options. Although surgery can provide treatment, it often significantly increases recovery time. You should talk to your primary care doctor about all your options before pursuing surgical treatment.