

Spinal Arachnoiditis

Spinal arachnoiditis is a type of pain disorder causing inflammation of the arachnoid, which is one of the membranes surrounding and protecting the nerves within the spinal cord. It is often associated with burning pain, severe stinging and a host of neurological problems.

The term arachnoid comes from the Greek “Arachne” meaning spider, because of the fine delicate spider-web type membrane which it forms.

Arachnoid inflammation can lead to scar tissue forming and cause the sheath around the spinal cord to become damaged. Any number of different things can lead to inflammation, such as chemicals, a direct injury to the spine, an infection from viruses or bacteria, complications from invasive spinal procedures and chronic spinal nerve compression.

There isn't a consistent pattern of symptoms for the condition, but many people will find that it affects the nerves that connect to the legs and lower back. Common symptoms can also cause the following:

- Muscle spasms, cramps and twitching
- Bowel, bladder and sexual problems
- Severe pain that resembles an electric shock
- Numbness, tingling or weakness in the legs
- Sensations resembling insects crawling down the skin or water trickling

Spinal Arachnoiditis Anatomy

The spinal cord is similar to a bundle of nerves that run from your brain down to your lower back. This is the central nervous system, and its function is to control body functions. The spinal cord and brain is surrounded by a thin membrane known as the arachnoid. These membranes (three of them) are collectively known as the meninges. The three layers are known as the arachnoid mater, the dura mater, and the pia mater.

Causes of Arachnoiditis

1. One of the most common causes is from a mistake that a surgeon may make, where the arachnoid is accidentally cut. This is possible, but rare, during spinal surgery.
2. Trauma to the spinal cord can also cause injury to the arachnoid.
3. Repeated epidural injections can cause arachnoiditis (rare).
4. Viral infections that can cause meningitis.
5. Injecting dye into the spinal cord.

Arachnoiditis is usually determined through a careful case history, but may also be visible on an MRA (this is a scan where a contrast or dye is injected into the spine).

How to Treat Spinal Arachnoiditis:

There isn't a cure for the condition. Common treatment options for the condition are similar to those for treating other chronic pain conditions. Most of the time, treatment focuses on relieving pain and improving upon those symptoms that hinder regular daily activities. Health care professionals will often recommend a program of pain management, exercise, psychotherapy and physiotherapy. Surgery for the condition can often be quite controversial since the outcomes are often poor and only provide you with temporary relief. Steroid injections and electrical stimulation are currently being used to determine how effective the treatments are.

Tips:

- Maintaining good mental and physical health can help to prevent and cope with any constant pain you might be experiencing.
- Make sure to get an adequate amount of rest at night. Your body needs time to heal and recover.
- Take the time to address any health problems from an early stage. Don't wait until they are too bad to do anything about them.
- Learn how to alternate activities with rest throughout the day. Beyond being active, you need to know when to take it easy and relax.
- Reduce any stress that you currently have in your life to help prevent chronic pain.
- Consider spinal surgery carefully – look at other routes for rehabilitation.