

Cauda Equina Syndrome

Low back pain is relatively common. Millions of people are affected. In the majority of cases, you don't have to worry about having surgery for the lower back pain. In rare situations, severe back pain might cause cauda equina syndrome, which is a condition requiring immediate surgical treatment. Those who have this syndrome are often admitted into the hospital as a medical emergency.

Cauda equina syndrome is a rare disorder that is classified as a surgical emergency. For those who have this syndrome, something causes the spinal nerve roots to compress. Fast treatment is required to prevent any lasting damage that will lead to incontinence and potential permanent paralysis of the legs.

Cauda equina syndrome affects the bundle of nerve roots that are referred to as the cauda equina (literally translated to meaning horse's tail, as the nerves at the bottom of the spinal cord branch out much like a horse's tail). These nerves are found at the lower portion of the spinal cord within the lumbar spine. These nerves receive and send messages to and from your feet, legs and pelvic organs.

Cauda Equina Syndrome Anatomy

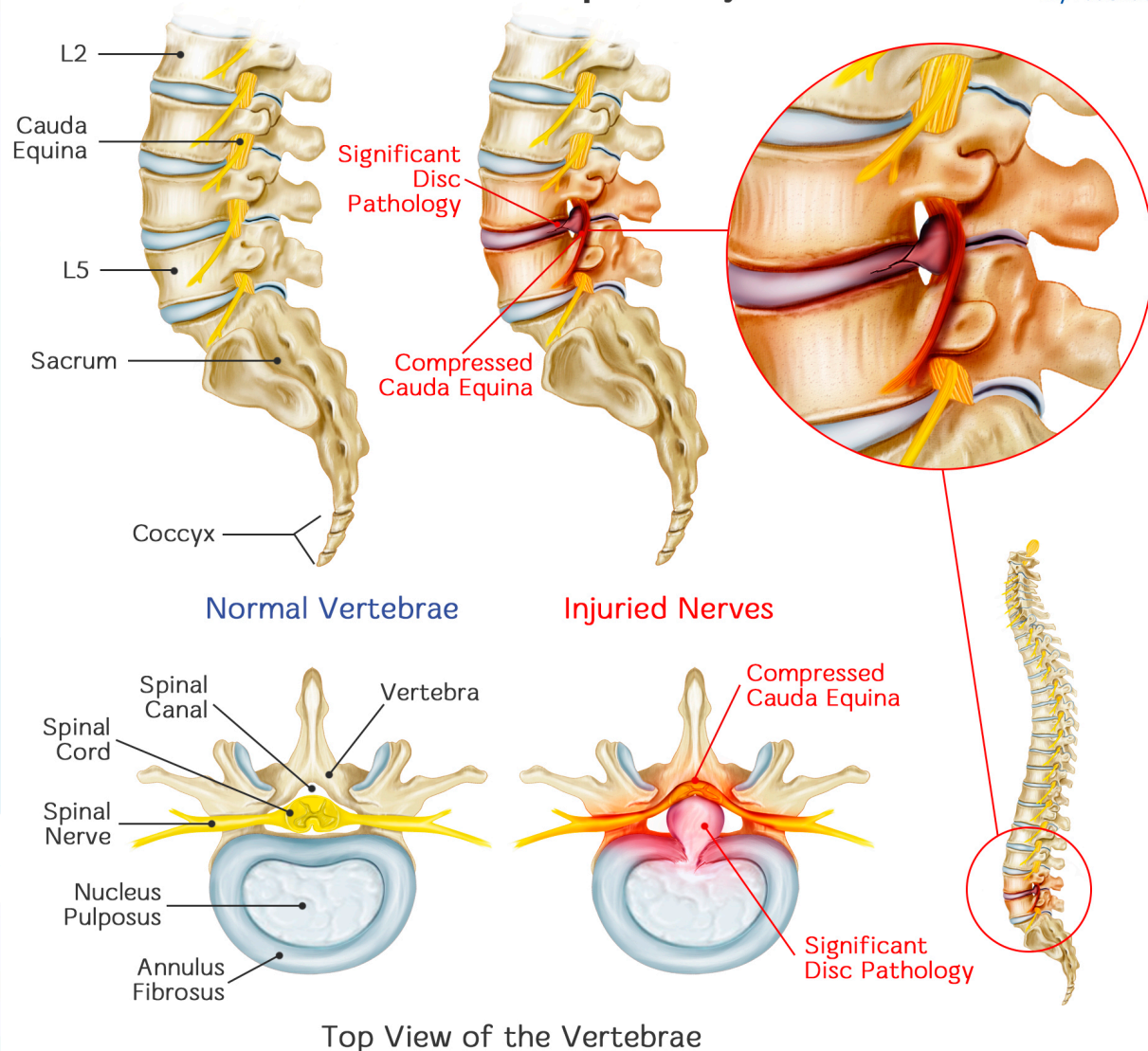
Understanding the anatomy of the spinal cord involves:

- Front view of the spinal cord and the spine
- The spinal cord ends at L1 and L2 of the lumbar spine
- The conus medullaris ends at the spinal cord in the back
- The cauda equina is a bunch of nerves located at the base of the spinal cord. The nerves of the cauda equina supply the rectum, perineum, bladder and legs.



MRI scan shows a large disc herniation completely compressing the cauda equina

Cauda Equina Syndrome



Cauda equina syndrome can be caused by anything that physically compresses the cauda equina. Such things may include the slippage of a vertebra, gross degenerative changes, fracture, or tumour.

The key characteristics are numbing or pains into both legs, loss of sensation or feeling around your anus or sex organs, or incontinence.

How to Treat Cauda Equina Syndrome:

1. Surgery

Surgical decompression for the spinal canal is one of the best options for relieving tension within the spinal cavity. Thanks to a laminectomy or other approach within 48 hours of symptoms and diagnosis, you can lead a healthy lifestyle in no time. This particular approach helps to prevent any permanent nerve damage and returns the individual to their previous physical condition. Removing blood clots or hematomas, bone fragments, tumors and repairing herniated discs is done based upon the individual cause of the syndrome.

2. Medications

Pain that results from the condition can be managed with an anti-inflammatory medication. Presence of inflammation in the spine requires administering of methylprednisolone (a steroid) to help relieve inflammation. Cauda equina syndrome caused by infectious conditions need to be treated with an antibiotic. Malignant neoplasms need to be treated with chemotherapy and radiation to totally eliminate the cancer.

3. Time

Generally not recommended, but time can often improve the situation and some sufferers who for one reason or another do not receive the necessary immediate medical attention may find that time heals and the compression on the cauda equina reduces.

Tips:

- Those who have a history of back problems are more prone to developing cauda equina syndrome.
- A blood clotting disorder leaves an individual more at risk for developing this syndrome.
- Being treated with Coumadin and heparin are both thought to increase the risk of developing cauda equina syndrome.
- If you begin noticing problems with incontinence or difficulty in urination, you need to address those concerns with a medical professional.
- Pain that worsens in the back, increasing numbness and weakness in the legs and difficulty walking are all signs of cauda equina syndrome and need to be addressed immediately.
- Avoid ALL forward bending immediately.



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