

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Spinal Stenosis - Treatment

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

In last week's class we began to cover what spinal stenosis is and how it occurs. We also talked about what symptoms it causes. Today we intend to get into treatment of the condition.

All treatment, as you learned here long ago, is based on an accurate diagnosis. In the case of spinal stenosis history is all important and often makes the diagnosis. This is supplemented with examination, plain x-rays and often an MRI study (CT scan or CT myelogram can be used if MRI is contraindicated).

Medical Treatment

As in all things I treat, there is a menu of treatment as I like to call it. It is always ideal to begin with the least invasive treatment.

Medication

Analgesics such as Tylenol or Darvocet can be used to treat the symptoms. It is usually not a good idea to use narcotic medication such as Vicodin in a chronic condition like this. Since many spinal stenosis patients may have other medical problems and be on other medication, the use of non steroidal can be harmful in patients with hypertension and heart disease.

Physical Therapy

If therapy is to have any hope of working, I want my patients to go to a physical therapist for proper instruction in stretching and strengthening exercises and aerobics.

You can't do it with a piece of paper given to the patient in a doctor's office that shows a few basic exercises. Patients need more specific direction if this is to help. A physical therapist instructing the patient provides this. It is thought that proper exercises can help stabilize the pelvis and lower back, improve cardiovascular conditioning and enhance the strength and flexibility of the muscles, ligaments and tendons.

Brace

Some patients who can wear one are helped by wearing a brace or corset that can help stabilize the back. This is not a major treatment of spinal stenosis, however.

Epidural Injections

If pain is severe, the injection of corticosteroids and local anesthetics into the spinal canal is an option. Some patients choose this if surgery is not possible because of other serious medical conditions or if the patient won't even consider surgical treatment.

The epidural injections are always given in a special hospital location using sophisticated x-ray imaging. The medication must be placed accurately in the region of the stenosis. Reduction of even a small amount of pressure on spinal nerves by the injections can give significant relief of symptoms.

The injections are typically given once a week for three weeks. They are only administered by physicians specially trained to do this. A back injection in an office exam room **was not** an epidural injection.

Surgical option of treatment is a large enough subject to merit its own class. The quiz at the end will be worth ten points!

More information about spinal stenosis and other things I treat? Go to our office teaching website for patients and families, www.orthopodsurgeon.com, which also can lead you to Your Orthopaedic Connection.

In The Know

This is our 47th Argus Orthopaedic Zone article! With the redesign of our office website www.orthopodsurgeon.com there will be a section of the website where all the articles that have appeared in the Shepherd Argus will be cataloged by title. You will be able to easily retrieve the entire text of every article electronically on line.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free functional lives.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush