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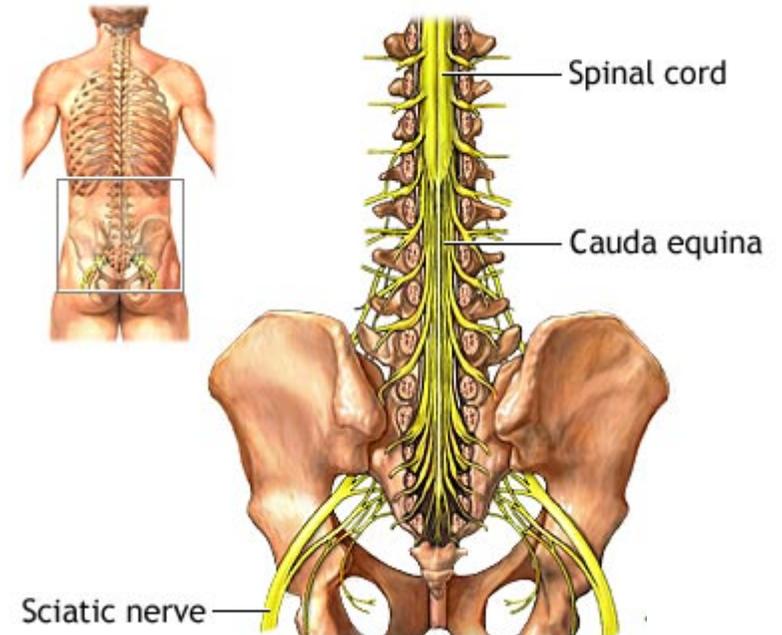
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# Cauda Equina Syndrome



A rare but serious complication  
of spinal conditions

## Contact Details

Spinal Team

Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre

Windmill Road

Headington

Phone: 01865 738051

Web Site [www.noc.nhs.uk](http://www.noc.nhs.uk)

Cauda Equina Syndrome version 1

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**Cauda Equina Syndrome is a rare but serious spinal condition.**

**It needs immediate medical examination and treatment.**

### **Treatment**

If Cauda Equina Syndrome is confirmed on the scan, urgent spinal surgery is indicated, to prevent permanent damage to the nerves which supply the bladder and bowel.

### **Prognosis**

How well people do after spinal surgery for Cauda Equina Syndrome depends on the cause, how severe the symptoms were and how long they had the symptoms before the operation.

In people who had badly affected bladder and bowel control before surgery, recovery is often incomplete, and sexual difficulties may persist.

**If you suddenly develop any of the above symptoms then it is strongly recommended that you contact:**

- **your GP as an emergency**

**or**

- **an accident and emergency department.**

## Diagnosis

Initially the diagnosis of Cauda Equina Syndrome is made from the information that you tell the clinician who assesses you. The examination findings are useful in that they give an indication of how urgently the problem needs treatment.

In Cauda Equina Syndrome there may be a problem with your ability to feel a pin prick around your buttocks, genitals and/or back passage. The strength of the muscle which controls the back passage may be reduced. Like patients with nerve root pain you may also have changes to the sensation of the legs, strength of the leg muscles or reduced reflexes.

## Investigations

A spinal scan (MRI) is essential when Cauda Equina Syndrome is suspected. The scan will confirm or rule out the condition and demonstrate which level of the spine is involved. In addition the scans help the clinician plan appropriate treatment and decide on the clinical urgency.

You have been given this leaflet because you may have or are at risk of Cauda Equina Syndrome. It is very important that you read and understand this information.

## What is the Cauda Equina Syndrome?

The spinal cord extends from the brain down through a canal inside the vertebral column. At each level of the spine nerves branch off from your spinal cord (nerve roots) and are responsible for sending signals to and from the muscles and other structures throughout your body. The spinal cord finishes just above your waist, below this is the group of nerves called the Cauda Equina. The nerves of the Cauda Equina are responsible for supplying the muscles that control the bladder, bowel and the legs.

**Cauda Equina Syndrome** is the symptoms which occur when the nerves of the Cauda Equina are compressed.

## Cause

Numerous causes of Cauda Equina syndrome have been reported, the most common being, very large disc prolapse or spinal stenosis (a narrow spinal canal). Less common causes include tumour, infection, or trauma. Cauda Equina syndrome is rare but occurs mainly in adults but at any age.

## Symptoms

Cauda Equina Syndrome presents as one or a combination of the following symptoms. Most commonly these symptoms develop suddenly and may worsen rapidly, within hours or days. However some people develop symptoms gradually.

### Saddle Anaesthesia

- Loss of feeling between the legs
- Numbness in or around the back passage and/or genitals
- Inability to feel the toilet paper when wiping
- **Bladder disturbance**
  - Inability to urinate (pass water)
  - Difficulty initiating urination (urinary hesitancy)
  - Loss of sensation when you pass urine.
  - Inability to stop or control urination (incontinence)
  - Loss of the full bladder sensation
- **Bowel disturbance**
  - Inability to stop a bowel movement (incontinence)
  - Constipation
  - Loss of sensation when passing a bowel motion.
- **Sexual problems**
  - Inability to achieve an erection or ejaculate (Males)
  - Loss of sensation during intercourse

## Nerve Root Pain

It is likely that you will have a combination of back pain, leg pain, leg numbness or weakness. These, symptoms however are common in people who have back problems but do not have Cauda Equina Syndrome.

