

The Wharfedale Clinic Patient Information Leaflet

Cauda Equina – A medical emergency

Know what is it and what the warning signs are

Patients often have a combination of back pain, leg pain, leg numbness and leg weakness. These symptoms can be very distressing but they do not usually require emergency medical attention. However, there is a condition known as Cauda Equina Syndrome (CES) which is an uncommon but serious neurological condition affecting the cauda equina.

The cauda equina is a group of nerves at the lowest point of your back that control your legs, bladder and bowel function and supply sensation to the skin around the bottom, back passage, genitals and inner thigh. **Cauda Equina Syndrome occurs when this group of nerves are compressed and this IS considered a medical emergency.**

The most common cause of compression is when a disc in the lower back occupies the same space as the nerves. Any delay in the diagnosis of cauda equina syndrome can impact recovery and could lead to permanent damage, such as bladder and bowel incontinence or paralysis of the legs. So this is why it is important to be aware of the signs.

Cauda equina warning signs:

Any of the warning signs below, or a combination, could be symptoms of cauda equina syndrome. **If you are experiencing any of these warning signs, please seek help immediately by going to your local Accident and Emergency Department.** Take this leaflet with you to help explain your symptoms.

- A recent onset of significant pain and/or a feeling of pins and needles/numbness in **both** legs.
- Loss of feeling/pins and needles between your inner thighs or genitals.
- Numbness in or around your back passage or buttocks.
- An altered feeling when using toilet paper to wipe yourself.
- Increasing difficulty when you try to urinate.
- Increasing difficulty when you try to stop or control your flow of urine.
- Loss of sensation when you pass urine.
- New onset of leaking of urine or recent use of pads in association with your low back/leg symptoms.
- Not knowing when your bladder is either empty or full.
- Inability to stop a bowel motion or leaking.
- Loss of sensation when you pass a bowel motion.
- Change in ability to achieve an erection or ejaculate.
- Loss of sensation in genitals during sexual intercourse.

Where can I find out more?

The following websites have further information regarding cauda equina syndrome:

https://www.physio-pedia.com/Cauda_Equina_Syndrome

<https://caudaequinak.org.uk/>

<https://www.ihavecaudaequina.com/>