Spinal Stenosis

Spinal stenosis is a narrowing of the spaces where nerves leave the spine. This puts pressure on the nerves causing pain, numbness or tingling. It is a common condition as people age. It is caused by joint swelling, scarring, with discs that are less flexible with age or arthritis. If you have had arthritis in your spine, a slipped or herniated disk, or any other back or neck injury, you may be more likely to have stenosis.

**Signs**

- Stenosis most often occurs in the lower back, called lumbar stenosis. Signs may include:
  - Pain and numbness in one leg is common, but it could be both legs
  - Numbness, cramping or pain in the back, buttocks or legs that are worse when standing or when walking but ease when sitting or leaning forward
  - Problems walking for long periods without sitting to take a break
- It can also occur in the neck, called cervical stenosis. Signs will be in the arm, shoulder and neck.
- Signs of spinal stenosis often get worse over time.

**Testing**

Your doctor will find the location of your pain during a physical exam. You may also have one or more of these tests:

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Learn more about your health care.
• Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) – a test that uses radio waves and a magnetic field to take pictures of soft tissue and bones.

• Spinal scan or other test that uses a special computer called computerized tomography (CT) to take pictures of small segments or slices of the spine. It can give a better picture of bones and tissue.

• X-ray may also be used to check your spine.

• Nerve conduction test, if you have numbness or tingling. This test may be done to check the health of the nerves in your back. For more information see the handout, Electromyogram and Nerve Conduction Tests.

Your Care
Talk to your doctor about your signs. Work with your doctor and other members of your health care team on a plan of treatment. Treatment may include:

• Medicines to help with back pain
• Physical therapy to make the muscles stronger and to help with pain
• Braces
• Surgery to reduce pressure on your nerves or spinal cord.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.