

Be Prepared: Palliative Care Emergencies in the Home

A Tool for Patients and Caregivers



This tool helps you know the actions you can take and reassuring words to use if your loved one is experiencing a spinal cord compression. Your healthcare provider will review the actions with you.

Actions you can take	Comforting Words
<p>Watch for signs</p> <p>Look for signs of spinal cord compression. Early identification and treatment can help alleviate symptoms and improve overall comfort (see listing on flip side).</p> <div data-bbox="864 526 998 696"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Pain <input type="checkbox"/> Sensation <input type="checkbox"/> Movement <input type="checkbox"/> Bladder/Bowel </div>	<p><i>"It is important for us to look out for early signs and let the nurse know."</i></p> <p><i>"Have you noticed any unusual back pain or tingling lately?"</i></p> <p><i>"Do your legs feel weak when you try to stand or walk?"</i></p>
<p>Medication management</p> <p>Ensure the patient takes prescribed pain relief or anti-inflammatory medications as directed by the healthcare professional. Having these medications on hand and administering them promptly can help alleviate acute symptoms (your nurse will show you how).</p> <div data-bbox="864 807 998 906"> </div>	<p><i>"This medication will help you. The nurse has shown me how to administer it."</i></p>
<p>Comfortable positions</p> <p>Help the patient in finding a comfortable resting position. This might be reclining with the head slightly elevated or lying flat, depending on what the patient finds most relieving. Using pillows for support can also help. Your healthcare team will show you how to safely do this.</p> <div data-bbox="864 1050 1032 1117"> </div>	<p><i>"I'm here with you" or "I won't be leaving"</i></p> <p><i>"Let's make you more comfortable with some pillows. Let me know if you feel any pain."</i></p>
<p>Cooling or heating</p> <p>Applying a cold pack or warm compress to the affected area can sometimes help in reducing inflammation and alleviating pain. Always use a cloth barrier between the skin and the pack to avoid burns or frostbite. Your healthcare team will suggest what and how to use it.</p> <div data-bbox="894 1238 1024 1349"> </div>	<p><i>"Would you like a warm or cold compress for your back? It might help with the pain. I'll make sure to wrap it in a cloth so it's comfortable on your skin."</i></p>
<p>Contact your healthcare team</p> <p>If the flare-up is severe, unusual, or doesn't improve with at-home measures, contact your nurse right away so they can take steps to make the patient more comfortable and prevent further physical problems.</p> <div data-bbox="911 1448 1015 1559"> </div>	<p><i>"I've called the nurse. They will be able to help us."</i></p>

- IF:**
- ✓ you feel overwhelmed and need help.
 - ✓ you feel your loved one is not feeling better after trying different strategies.
 - ✓ you are worried about spinal cord compression.
 - ✓ you have questions about what to do.



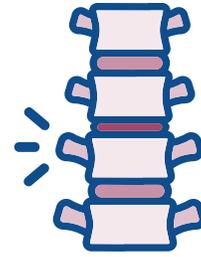
Call your Healthcare Team

Day time: _____

Evening: _____

Night time: _____

5 things you should know about Spinal Cord Compression



1 What is spinal cord compression?

Spinal cord compression happens when something, like a tumour or bone fragment, presses on the spinal cord. This can damage the nerves and cause muscle weakness, loss of feeling, paralysis in the legs or arms, or trouble controlling the bladder or bowel.

2 What causes spinal cord compression?

Spinal cord compression happens when there's too much pressure on the spinal cord. This can be due to tumours on the spine or if cancer spreads to the bones of the spine. Sometimes tumours can also grow in the space around the spinal cord. When this happens, the nerves in the spinal cord can be damaged. This makes it hard for the brain to talk to the rest of the body

3 What signs should I look for?

Individuals with certain types of serious illnesses can have a higher risk for spinal cord compression. Here's what you should watch out for:

- **Pain:** There might be an unusual, severe pain in the spine that changes with posture or disrupts sleep. Sometimes, this pain can shoot down the leg or arm or even wrap around the chest or stomach.
- **Sensation:** The individual may also experience sensations like tingling, or electric shocks, in the arms or legs, and there could be new numbness in the legs, arms, chest, or lower body.
- **Movement:** Movement-wise, there can be a noticeable stiffness or a feeling of heaviness that affects walking or balance, along with a new onset of weakness in the legs or arms.
- **Bladder/Bowel:** There may be issues related to bladder or bowel control, including an inability to control or fully empty them.

4 How can we treat spinal cord compression?

There are several ways to treat spinal cord compression.

- Some treatments focus on easing symptoms to make sure the person is comfortable. This doesn't necessarily treat the compression directly. For this, medications can manage pain and lessen swelling. Gentle exercises can also help with movement and reduce stiffness.
- Other treatments aim to directly address the compression; surgery can ease pressure on the spinal cord or use radiation therapy to target and treat the affected area.

The healthcare team will work with the patient and their caregivers to determine which option is best for them.

5 When should I call the healthcare team?

Always know your healthcare team is available to support you. In any of these situations, it's crucial to get in touch with the healthcare team promptly to prevent further complications and ensure the patient's comfort and safety.

- **Sudden or severe pain:** If the patient experiences a sudden increase in pain or severe pain that is not alleviated with their usual pain relief methods.
- **Loss of movement:** If the patient suddenly can't move their arms or legs, or if there's a significant decline in their ability to walk or move about.
- **Bladder/Bowel control:** If the patient suddenly loses control over their bladder or bowel, or if they can't empty their bladder or bowel at all.
- **New or worsening numbness:** If there's a sudden onset of numbness or tingling, especially in the legs or arms, or if existing numbness becomes more pronounced.
- **Breathing difficulties:** If the patient experiences trouble breathing, especially if the compression is in the cervical (neck) area of the spine, which can affect respiratory function.