

# Cervical Stenosis

The term 'musculoskeletal' refers to muscles and bones, and there are a range of common problems with muscles and bones that people with physical disabilities may experience.

Cervical stenosis is a narrowing of the spinal column in the neck. The space that is around the spinal column becomes thinner as the bones change position. Clinically, cervical stenosis occurs in people with cerebral palsy who have asymmetry – a difference on each side of the body – and studies have found that those with athetoid type cerebral palsy have a greater risk of developing the condition.

## What are the effects of cervical stenosis in cerebral palsy?

- If the narrowing of the spinal column is large combined with heightened spinal changes such as disc degeneration and instability, it can mean that the spinal cord could be stopped from sending messages down the spine.
- This means people can experience a fast decrease in function and devastating neurological impairment.

- Put simply, if cervical stenosis is not picked up, people can go from being independent with walking and transfers to having quadriplegia within a very short space of time.

## What do I need to do to make sure I am not at risk?

- Be monitored by physiotherapy every year regardless of your abilities. While studies do indicate that those with athetoid type cerebral palsy are at greater risk, people with spastic and hemiplegia type cerebral palsy have also experienced deterioration.
- Ask your physiotherapist to complete a neurological power and sensory assessment every year and more often if you show signs of cervical stenosis.
  - This type of assessment looks at your sensation, your reflexes and your strength in your muscles that are distributed by each spinal level.



- If you experience a sudden change in your abilities, see your doctor and physiotherapist immediately and consider attending the emergency department if you cannot walk or transfer or feel parts of your body that you could previously do.
- If you already know that you are at risk of cervical stenosis and experience a sudden change, go immediately to the emergency department.

## Cervical Stenosis cont.

### What do I do if I notice changes in what I can do?

- If you experience a sudden change in your bladder and bowel control, see your doctor immediately. If this change occurs with changes in your abilities, attend the emergency department immediately.
- If you experience a change in what you can feel, numbness, pins and needles, especially if they occur in both hands or both legs, see your doctor and physiotherapist as soon as possible for review.
- See the Future Thinking website for information on knowing Your Normal. Your therapy team and doctor can help you to write down what your normal is. Knowing your normal can make it easier to explain to health professionals that what you are experiencing is a big change and that it is not related to your cerebral palsy.

### What happens if I do get neurological changes because of cervical stenosis?

- Surgical intervention is the only option to restore your function and prevent you deteriorating further.
- A neurosurgeon will assess you and determine the best approach to support you.
- Intensive rehabilitation will occur after your surgery.
- People who have had surgery have varied results as it depends on how quickly the problems are picked up and the extent of the problems. People who have had their problems picked up early are more likely to return to close to their original function.



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