

Cervical Myelopathy (Pressure on the Spinal Cord in the Neck)

Understanding your symptoms—and knowing when to act early

What is Cervical Myelopathy?

Cervical myelopathy is a condition where the **spinal cord in your neck becomes compressed**.

To explain this simply:

Your spine is not just made of bones—it also contains the **spinal cord**, which is like a “main cable” carrying signals between your brain and the rest of your body.

👉 When there is **pressure on this spinal cord in the neck**, it can affect:

- Your hands
- Your arms
- Your legs
- Your balance
- Your coordination

This is different from a “pinched nerve,” which usually affects one arm or one leg.

👉 Cervical myelopathy affects **the whole system** because the spinal cord controls multiple body functions.

Why Does It Happen?

Cervical myelopathy usually develops gradually due to **wear and tear in the neck** over time.

Common causes include:

- Disc bulging or slipped disc
- Bone spurs (extra bone growth)
- Thickened ligaments
- Narrowing of the spinal canal (tight space in the spine)

All of these can **reduce the space available for the spinal cord**, leading to compression.

Why is It Important?

This is one of the **more serious spine conditions** because it involves the spinal cord—not just the nerves.

👉 If left untreated, it can lead to:

- Progressive weakness
- Difficulty walking
- Loss of coordination

👉 The key message:

This condition often gets worse over time if not treated early.

Symptoms to Watch For

Cervical myelopathy can start subtly. Many patients do not realise something serious is developing.

1. Hand Symptoms (Often the First Sign)

- Clumsiness in hands
- Difficulty buttoning clothes
- Trouble writing
- Dropping objects
- Weak grip

👉 Patients often say:

“My hands don’t feel as precise as before.”

2. Balance and Walking Problems

- Feeling unsteady when walking
- Frequent tripping
- Difficulty walking in a straight line
- Slower walking speed

👉 A common description:

“I feel like I’m losing balance, especially when walking.”

3. Numbness or Tingling

- In the hands or arms
- Sometimes in the legs
- A general “strange sensation” in the limbs

4. Weakness

- In arms or hands
- Sometimes in the legs
- Difficulty lifting objects

5. Neck Symptoms

- Neck pain or stiffness
- Reduced neck movement

(Note: Some patients have minimal neck pain but still have significant spinal cord compression.)

6. More Advanced Symptoms 🚑

- Difficulty with coordination
- Trouble using hands for fine tasks
- Significant walking difficulty
- Loss of balance even on flat ground

7. Urgent Warning Signs 🚑

Seek immediate medical attention if you notice:

- Rapid worsening of walking ability
- Frequent falls
- Severe weakness
- Loss of bladder or bowel control

👉 These may indicate **serious spinal cord compression requiring urgent treatment.**

When Should You See a Neurosurgeon?

Cervical myelopathy is not a condition to “wait and see” if symptoms are progressing.

You should seek specialist evaluation if you notice:

- Hand clumsiness
- Difficulty with coordination
- Balance problems
- Weakness in arms or legs
- Symptoms affecting daily life

👉 Even mild symptoms can be important.

👉 A key difference:

Pain can come and go—but loss of coordination is a warning sign.

Early diagnosis allows for better outcomes and prevents further deterioration.

How is Cervical Myelopathy Treated?

Treatment depends on:

- Severity of symptoms
- Degree of spinal cord compression
- Progression of the condition

1. Non-Surgical Treatment (Limited Role)

Unlike simple neck pain, non-surgical treatment has a **limited role** in cervical myelopathy.

This is because:

👉 The problem is **pressure on the spinal cord**, not just inflammation.

However, mild and stable cases may be monitored with:

- Physiotherapy
- Activity modification
- Close observation

2. When is Surgery Recommended?

Surgery is often recommended if:

- Symptoms are present and progressing
- There is clear spinal cord compression
- Balance or coordination is affected
- Weakness is present

👉 The aim of surgery is:

To relieve pressure on the spinal cord and prevent further damage

3. What Does Surgery Involve?

Modern spinal surgery focuses on **creating space for the spinal cord**.

The approach depends on where the compression is located.

Common Surgical Options

Anterior Cervical Discectomy (ACDF)

- Removing the disc or bone pressing on the spinal cord
- Stabilising the spine
- One of the most commonly performed procedures

Cervical Disc Replacement

- Preserves movement in selected patients
- An alternative to fusion in certain cases

Posterior Decompression (Laminectomy or Laminoplasty)

- Creating more space from the back of the spine
- Used in specific cases with multi-level compression

What to Expect After Surgery

- Relief of pressure on the spinal cord
- Stabilisation of symptoms
- Gradual improvement over time

👉 Important to understand:

- Surgery aims to **stop progression**
- Improvement varies depending on how early treatment is done

Frequently Asked Questions

“Will I fully recover?”

Recovery depends on how long the spinal cord has been compressed. Early treatment gives the best chance of improvement.

“Is surgery urgent?”

If symptoms are worsening, early surgery is often advised to prevent permanent damage.

“Is it safe?”

Modern techniques make surgery safer and more precise, with careful planning and monitoring.

Why Choose a Specialist?

Cervical myelopathy is a condition where **timing and accuracy matter greatly**.

Choosing the right specialist ensures:

- Correct diagnosis
- Early detection of spinal cord compression
- Appropriate timing of treatment
- Use of advanced surgical techniques when needed

As a **Consultant Neurosurgeon**, I focus on conditions affecting the brain and spine, including complex spinal cord disorders like cervical myelopathy.

My approach is:

- ✓ Clear explanation in simple language
- ✓ Careful assessment of symptoms and scans

- ✓ Honest discussion of treatment options
- ✓ Focus on preventing long-term disability
- ✓ Use of modern surgical techniques

👉 Most importantly:

You are treated as an individual—not just a scan result.

A Reassuring Thought

Hearing about “spinal cord compression” can feel overwhelming.

But here is what you should know:

- 👉 It is a **treatable condition**
- 👉 Early treatment can prevent worsening
- 👉 Many patients stabilise and improve with proper care
- 👉 You do not have to face this alone

The key is **not to delay assessment**.

Take the First Step Toward Clarity

If you are experiencing:

- Hand clumsiness
- Difficulty walking
- Balance problems
- Weakness

These are not symptoms to ignore.

A consultation can help you understand:

- What is causing your symptoms
- Whether your spinal cord is affected
- What treatment is best for you

Book Your Consultation

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- 👉 Don't wait for symptoms to worsen
- 👉 Early treatment can prevent permanent damage
- 👉 The right care can protect your mobility and independence

Take the first step today—your spinal cord health matters.