Neck Disc Prolapse and Arm Pain (Cervical Radiculopathy)

One-page summary of the full Spinemathema guide. Scan the QR code for the full guide, with references and audio.

Key points

- Cervical radiculopathy means a nerve root in the neck is being pinched, usually by a bulging disc or a bony spur, producing pain, tingling or weakness in the arm.
- Most people recover without an operation. The British Association of Spine Surgeons (BASS) patient information reports that around 6 in 10 improve by six weeks and 7 to 8 in 10 by three months.
- Surgery is generally reserved for severe pain that has not eased after several weeks, or for significant or worsening nerve weakness.
- Operations are very effective for arm pain but are not designed to treat neck pain on its own.

Seek urgent medical help (A&E or 999) if you have:

- Rapidly worsening weakness in an arm or hand
- Clumsy hands, unsteady walking or frequent stumbling, which may mean the spinal cord itself is being squeezed
- New difficulty controlling your bladder or bowels
- Numbness or weakness affecting both arms or both legs

These symptoms can suggest pressure on the spinal cord.

Not sure how urgent it is? Call NHS 111. More warning signs: spinemathema.com/warning-signs

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General information only, not personal medical advice.
If you are worried about your symptoms, contact your GP, NHS 111, or in an emergency call 999.

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Scan for the full guide