Degenerative Spondylolisthesis

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

Key points

- Degenerative spondylolisthesis means one lumbar vertebra has slipped forward on the one below because the small joints at the back of the spine have worn.
- It is a common cause of lumbar spinal stenosis: leg pain or heaviness on walking or standing that eases when you sit or lean forward.
- Many people manage with activity changes, physiotherapy and pain relief, but persistent nerve symptoms often need surgery to free the nerves.
- The British Association of Spine Surgeons (BASS) patient information reports good leg-pain relief in about 70 to 80% of people after decompression surgery. Back pain responds less reliably.
- If you lose bladder or bowel control or have numbness around your bottom or genitals, go to A&E or call 999 straight away.

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

- Numbness or altered feeling around the genitals, back passage or inner thighs (the 'saddle' area)
- New difficulty passing urine, losing control of your bladder, or not being aware that your bladder is full
- Loss of bowel control
- A change in sexual sensation or function
- Weakness in one or both legs that is quickly getting worse

These can be warning signs of cauda equina syndrome, which needs emergency assessment. Please do not wait for a routine appointment.

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