



Pain After Spine Surgery: Why It Happens and What Can Help

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

Key points

- Some pain after spine surgery is normal. It usually eases over the following weeks, and most people are back to their usual activities within about three months.
- Pain that carries on beyond normal healing is now called persistent spinal pain syndrome type 2, a term that replaces "failed back surgery syndrome".
- It is common: studies suggest it affects somewhere between about 1 in 10 and 4 in 10 people after lumbar surgery.
- There are many possible causes. Finding the most likely one guides what will help.
- Help usually combines activity, physiotherapy and psychological support. Repeat surgery is only for a clear cause that can be corrected.

After spine surgery, contact your surgical team or NHS 111 straight away, or go to A&E, if you have:

- a wound that is hot, red, swollen, oozing or opening up;
- a high temperature, or you feel shivery and generally very unwell;
- new or worsening pain, weakness or numbness in your legs;
- new numbness around your bottom or genitals, or new problems controlling your bladder or bowels (go to A&E or call 999).

Numbness in the saddle area with bladder or bowel changes can be a sign of cauda equina syndrome, which is an emergency.

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

Last checked: October 2026

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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