



Spinal Tumours: Symptoms, Tests and Treatment

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

Key points

- Most spinal tumours are secondary (metastatic): they have spread from a cancer elsewhere in the body. Tumours that start in the spine are much less common.
- Many tumours that do start in or next to the spine are benign (not cancer), such as meningiomas, nerve sheath tumours and haemangiomas. Some never need treatment.
- Back or neck pain that is severe, keeps getting worse or wakes you at night should be checked, especially if you have had cancer.
- If you have, or have had, cancer and develop new weakness, numbness, difficulty walking or bladder or bowel problems, treat it as an emergency: call the number your cancer team gave you for this if you have one, otherwise go to A&E or call 999.
- Treatment depends on the type of tumour and can include monitoring with scans, radiotherapy, surgery, or cement injections for painful fractures.

If you have, or have had, cancer, get help immediately if you develop:

- New weakness in your arms or legs, legs that give way, or difficulty walking.
- New numbness or pins and needles, or numbness around your bottom or genitals.
- Problems controlling your bladder or bowels, difficulty passing urine, or new or worsening constipation.
- New back or neck pain that feels like a band around your chest or tummy, or spreads down an arm or leg.
- Back pain that is severe, getting worse, worse when you cough or strain, or keeping you awake at night.

If your cancer team has given you a number to call for these symptoms, call it straight away, even at night or at weekends. Otherwise, or if you cannot get through, go to A&E or call 999 and say you have cancer. If you have never had cancer, back pain with weakness or numbness in both legs, numbness around your bottom or genitals, or bladder or bowel changes still needs A&E or 999.

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.

Written by Mr Ahmed-Ramadan Sadek, Neurosurgeon.



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