Spondylolysis and Spondylolytic Spondylolisthesis

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

Key points

- Spondylolysis is a stress fracture through a thin bridge of bone at the back of a lumbar vertebra, called the pars interarticularis.
- If the fracture lets the vertebra slide forward, the condition is called spondylolytic (or isthmic) spondylolisthesis.
- Many people with a pars defect have no symptoms. Those who do usually improve with physiotherapy, activity changes and pain relief.
- A pars injection can both confirm that the fracture is the pain source and, for some, provide lasting relief.
- Surgery is for persistent symptoms. The British Association of Spine Surgeons (BASS) patient information reports good relief in about 7 in 10 people.

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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