

You can contact or visit any of these local health information centres for further information or support:

University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

The Patrick Room Cancer Centre
Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Edgbaston,
Birmingham, B15 2TH
Telephone: 0121 371 3537 / 39

Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust

Health Information Centre Birmingham
Heartlands Hospital, Bordesley Green,
Birmingham, B9 5SS
Telephone: 0121 424 2280

Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust

Sandwell General Hospital
Lyndon, West Bromwich, B71 4HJ
Telephone: 0121 507 3792

Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust

Palliative Care Centre,
Goscote Lane, Walsall, WS3 1SJ
Telephone: 0800 783 9050



Bone Metastases and Malignant Spinal Cord Compression (MSCC)

About this information:

This guide is provided for general information only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice.

Every effort is taken to ensure that this leaflet is accurate and consistent with current knowledge and practice at the time of publication. We are constantly striving to improve the quality of our information. If you have a suggestion about how this can be improved, please contact us via our website:

www.birminghamhospice.org.uk

Together, we're making every moment matter

Birmingham Hospice is the new name for Birmingham St Mary's Hospice and John Taylor Hospice.



This leaflet is to tell you some important details about a possible complication of your illness.

Although it is rare, cancer that has spread to the bones (also known as bone metastases) can sometimes cause further problems; this can be particularly troublesome if the cancer has spread to the bones of the spine or in certain types of cancer.

These problems can be managed if the clinical team caring for you is informed as soon as problems arise.

This leaflet is to help you learn about the signs and symptoms to look out for and the need to let your GP or hospital specialist know if things change.

It is important to stress, that not all patients develop serious problems from cancer that has spread to their bones, but it is essential that those who do, recognise the signs and symptoms.

When cancer has spread to the bones they can become weak and brittle and there is a risk of them breaking, although this is rare.

In the spine, cancer cells can trap or squeeze the spinal cord or nerves. This pressure can cause damage to the spinal cord which may cause weakness of the body (paralysis), pain, or problems with the bladder or bowel. This is called **spinal cord compression**.

Spinal cord compression is rare, but it is important to be aware so that you can alert healthcare professionals and it can be treated quickly.

MSCC will cause permanent problems if left untreated.

If you have any of the symptoms listed it is important that you tell someone from your clinical team (either your GP, a district nurse, a member of your oncologist team, or a hospice nurse or doctor) the same day (even if it is a weekend).

Do not wait for symptoms to get worse, get advice straight away. An assessment and investigations may then be done. In a few cases urgent treatment will be needed. The earlier treatment takes place the more effective it is likely to be.

Signs to look for and report immediately (the same day)

Pain

- Back pain in one part of your spine that is severe, distressing or different from your usual pain. This may be in the upper, middle or lower part of your back, or your neck.
- Severe increasing pain that changes with lying down or standing up, or that is worse when lifting, straining on the toilet, coughing or sneezing, walking or standing. This pain may wake you up at night or make sleeping difficult.
- Pain which starts in the spine and goes around the chest or abdomen (this can feel like you are being squeezed by a band or corset).
- Pain down the leg or arm.

Weakness

- A new feeling of clumsiness or weakness of the arms or legs.
- Difficulty walking.

Tingling or numbness

- Tingling, pins and needles, loss of sensation or numbness in the arms or legs.

Bladder or bowel problems

- Difficulty in controlling your bladder or bowels or not being able to empty your bladder.
- New constipation or constipation getting worse.



What should I do?

Get advice immediately, even if it is a weekend or holiday period.

- Call the clinical team where you usually go for your cancer follow-up clinics, your GP, your specialist nurse or key worker.
- Describe your symptoms.
- Explain that you are worried that you may have spinal cord compression and that you need to be seen urgently.
- Show the health professional this leaflet.

What will happen next?

You will need to be examined by a doctor who may ask for extra tests. The tests that may be performed are: X-rays, a bone scan or an MRI scan. If the tests show that treatment is needed someone from your clinical team will discuss the options with you.

The types of treatment that may be offered are:

- A course of corticosteroid medications, such as Dexamethasone (to reduce swelling and pressure on the nerves). Please tell your doctor if you are diabetic or have had problems with steroids previously.
- Radiotherapy (to reduce the size of the cancer and lessen the compression on nerves).
- Vertebroplasty (where cement is injected into bone to stabilise it).
- Or a combination of these options.

If the tests show no treatment is required or you chose not to have it, someone from your clinical team will answer your questions and make sure your symptoms are under control.