

# Lumbar Stenosis Syndrome



Congratulations, you have been diagnosed as having **Lumbar Stenosis Syndrome**. What is that you may ask? Well there are many types of low back problems and this is one. It presents with some common and predictable pain sites and problems.

Stenosis is a term given to decreased openings or canals between the vertebra of the spine where the nerves and other structures come out. The result is an increased chance of those structures being pinched or restricted in their movement. This may cause pain in the form of shooting, sharp, deep aches, and/or burning in addition to other sensations. These can be felt in the back, often more on one side than the other. It may also go into the buttocks and the back of the legs. If the nerves are affected it can cause muscle weakness, changes in skin sensation, and deep tendon reflexes.

The openings can become stenotic (closed) for a number of reasons. One is a problem with the disc between the vertebra. It herniates to a point where it is restricting the movement of the nerve and decreasing the size of the opening. Changes in the spine, which can be seen on x-ray, may show that the discs have become worn or are not holding the two vertebrae apart as much as they would normally. This will affect the spine in that the canals become smaller as the vertebrae get closer. A further problem is when the wear and tear of daily life affects the joints in the spine and they grow small bony out crops. These may grow into the openings or be close enough to decrease the size of these openings. These are called osteophytes.

Bending forward will generally increase the separation of the joints so sitting and bending straight forward is not a problem. The pain will be made worse by any activity or movement that increases the stress on the back of the spine, such as arching the back or standing for a long time. Walking often can be limited and will need to be followed by sitting to reduce the stenotic effect of the standing. You may feel well in the morning unless you twisted the wrong way during the night. You may become worse as the day goes on, in particular if you are standing or walking. Carrying an object that makes you bend back will be a problem, too.

If the condition is irritable, you may find you are stiff after rest, causing you to stand to loosen up, only to find that being up makes it worse after some time.

The physical structures will only change slowly over time, but gradually make you more susceptible to injury. Movements such as twisting, arching, and even worse, arching back and twisting at the same time, will add to the chances of aggravation. This may be serving in tennis, reaching into the back of the car from the front, or any awkward lifting.





Once you have the problem, you must rest the joints. This is done by making sure that you can reduce the arch in your back by wearing flatter shoes, and standing only when there is a step to rest a foot on. This eases the pressure on the back and decreases the need to arch.

The bottom line is, you now have a back problem that you can affect in a good or bad way depending on your position and activity.

The best analogy for this problem is that you have two cogs, which are normally held apart and don't come into contact with each other. They then become engaged to some degree and pinch things between them. Your goal is to keep the pressure off the posterior structures of the spine. This can be achieved by avoiding arching postures, standing, carrying, lifting on one side (holding young children on your hips, standing still while holding a grocery bag), or reaching behind you.

There is much you can do to ease the problem. Your clinician will show you specific exercises and stretches that will help you further. When you do the exercises they should not increase your pain or make the pain go further out into the leg. If they do, then you are either pushing the exercises too much or moving in the wrong direction. Check with your clinician.

Your clinician will show you ways to do things differently during the day to minimize the stress on the spine. This will mean that the pain should decrease, but first you will notice more movement before the pain comes on.

Treatment will vary depending on the pain level, stage, and and severity of your problem. Between you and the clinician, you will be able to manage this type of back problem well.

Notes from Your Physical Therapist:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Above & Beyond Physical Therapy.**

Phoenix

3201 W. Peoria Ave. D800 Phone: 602.866.2231

Phoenix, AZ 85029

Fax: 602.866.2261

Queen Creek

21321 E. Ocotillo Rd. Suite 122 Phone: 480.987.1870

Queen Creek, AZ 85142

Fax: 480.987.9289



[www.facebook.com/aboveandbeyondpt/](https://www.facebook.com/aboveandbeyondpt/) | [www.aboveandbeyondtherapy.com](http://www.aboveandbeyondtherapy.com)