

## Information for GPs

Each hospital has a MSCC Co-ordinator, who you can contact for advice, for Yeovil District Hospital please dial 07799 703266.

In hours this will be the Acute Oncology Team and out of hours, it will be the Medical Registrar.



# Malignant Spinal Cord Compression

Information for patients

**If you need this leaflet in another format, eg. large print or a different language, please ask a member of staff.**

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## Introduction

This leaflet is about a rare condition called Malignant Spinal Cord Compression (MSCC). It affects people with certain cancers that have spread to the bones in the spine, or have started in the spine.

This leaflet has been given to you so that you know what to look out for and what to do in case your cancer affects you in this way. Malignant Spinal Cord Compression is an emergency, and you will need to contact your doctor immediately if you experience the symptoms described in this leaflet.

## What is Malignant Spinal Cord Compression?

Malignant Spinal Cord Compression (MSCC) occurs when cancer cells grow in or near to the spine, and press on the spinal cord and nerves. This results in swelling and a reduction in the blood supply to the spinal cord and nerve roots. The symptoms of spinal cord compression are caused by the increasing pressure (compression) on the spinal cord and nerves.

Any type of cancer can spread to the bones of the spine, which may lead to spinal cord compression. However, it is more commonly seen in people with cancers of the breast, lung or prostate, and people who have lymphoma or myeloma.

Remember, MSCC only occurs in a small number of people.

## What should I look out for?

If your doctor has told you that you are at risk of MSCC, or you think you might be, then let your doctor know immediately if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Back pain anywhere from your neck downwards. The first symptom is usually any unexplained back pain, which may be mild to begin with, but lasts for more than one or two weeks. The pain may feel like a 'band' around the chest or abdomen, and can sometimes radiate over the lower back, into the buttocks or legs
- Numbness or 'pins and needles' in toes and fingers, or over the buttocks
- Feeling unsteady on your feet, having difficulty with walking, or your legs giving way
- Problems passing urine (these may include difficulty controlling your bladder, passing very little urine, or passing none at all)
- Constipation or problems controlling your bowels
- Back pain made worse by coughing, sneezing or straining
- Back pain which stops you from sleeping

These symptoms can also be caused by a number of other conditions. It is very important to let your doctor know if you have any of these symptoms so that they can be investigated.

**The earlier MSCC is diagnosed, the better the chances of the treatment being effective.**

## What should I do?

If you have any of the symptoms described in this leaflet, you must tell your doctor immediately; this may mean calling the out of hours services provided by your GP Surgery. Show your doctor this leaflet.

## What will happen next?

If your doctor is concerned that you might have spinal cord compression, he or she will usually send you straight to hospital, so that you can have an urgent scan and start the right treatment.

There is more detailed information on the Macmillan Cancer Support website at [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)