Spinal Cord Compression
Patient Education

Spinal cord compression is caused by a tumor or bone pressing against the spinal cord. If your cancer is around, or spreads to, the spinal cord or the bones of the spine, you have a high risk for having this problem.

Notify your doctor or nurse right away if you have:

- Back pain. The pain may feel like it is wrapping around your chest or waist like a belt or in one area in your back. It can come on gradually and get worse with coughing, sneezing, or movement.
- Numbness, tingling, loss of feeling, feeling of coldness in your arms or legs.
- Confusion, loss of balance, or increased sensitivity to touch.
- Muscle weakness, heaviness or stiffness in legs or arms or unsteadiness.
- Bowel and bladder problems such as feeling full after urinating, inability to completely empty your bladder of urine, leakage of urine, constipation, or inability to control your bladder or bowels.

Special Instructions

- Avoid heavy lifting; carrying heavy items and pulling/pushing (vacuuming, opening heavy doors).
- Take pain medications as ordered. If your pain is not controlled by the medication, tell your doctor or nurse.
- Your doctor may also order a medication (steroid) to decrease swelling to this area. If you are on a steroid, tell your doctor or nurse if you are unable to take the medication. It is very important to NOT stop taking steroids suddenly. This medication must be slowly decreased.
- Protect arms and legs from severe temperatures, (hot baths/spas, and severe cold weather).
- If you are constipated tell your doctor or nurse.

Treating spinal cord compression varies and may include surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and/or steroids. Your doctor and nurse can answer questions you may have regarding your treatment.