



## Adults with Cerebral Palsy: Do you have spinal cord complications?

### What kind of changes in spinal cord function are possible?

- Adults with cerebral palsy may be at risk for spinal cord compression as they get older
- This is called “spinal stenosis”
- Some people and even health care providers may attribute these symptoms to your CP, saying “your CP is getting worse.”
- This may occur at any age
- Early recognition of symptoms, seeking medical attention, and prompt treatment is essential>

### What are the symptoms of spinal stenosis?

Your CP is not getting worse!

- Change or loss of hand function, especially fine movements (using buttons on your clothes)
- Worsening of mobility (losing walking ability)
- Increases in falls or unsteadiness
- Changes in bowel and/or bladder control
- Changes in sensation/feeling (numbness in your hands or feet)
- More frequent fatigue
- NOTE: pain is rare!

### What should you do if you have any of these symptoms?

- See your own PCP regularly and tell him/her about any changes

- Ask for your own medical records of neurological and functional assessments from any health care provider to be made available to your PCP
- Ask your PCP to check regularly (yearly) your spinal cord function. He/she can do that by assessing:
  - Continence (bowel/bladder function)
  - Mobility (walking, ability to transfer, ability to drive your wheelchair)
  - Fine movements (hand function)
- If anything has changed, ask your PCP for urgent assessment and consideration of a referral to a specialist, including possibly
  - Neurology
  - Neurosurgery
  - Orthopedic Surgery
  - Physical Medical and Rehabilitation (Physiatry)
- Prompt radiological investigation (likely with an MRI) is frequently recommended after referral to a specialist

### Special Considerations for Adults with CP:

- Remember, CP does not “get worse;” a loss of function by an adult with CP may be a sign of spinal stenosis or of another, new illness, which your PCP can help diagnose.