

Metastatic spinal cord compression (MSCC)

This fact sheet is for men with advanced (metastatic) prostate cancer that has spread outside of the prostate gland to the bones. Partners and family members may also find it useful. The fact sheet tells you about a rare condition called metastatic spinal cord compression (MSCC). This can happen when cancer cells grow in or near to the spine and press on the spinal cord. You may also hear this condition called malignant spinal cord compression.

Metastatic spinal cord compression (MSCC) does not happen to all men whose cancer has spread to the bones. It is very rare but it is important that you are aware of the risk because if it does happen, you need to get treatment as soon as possible.

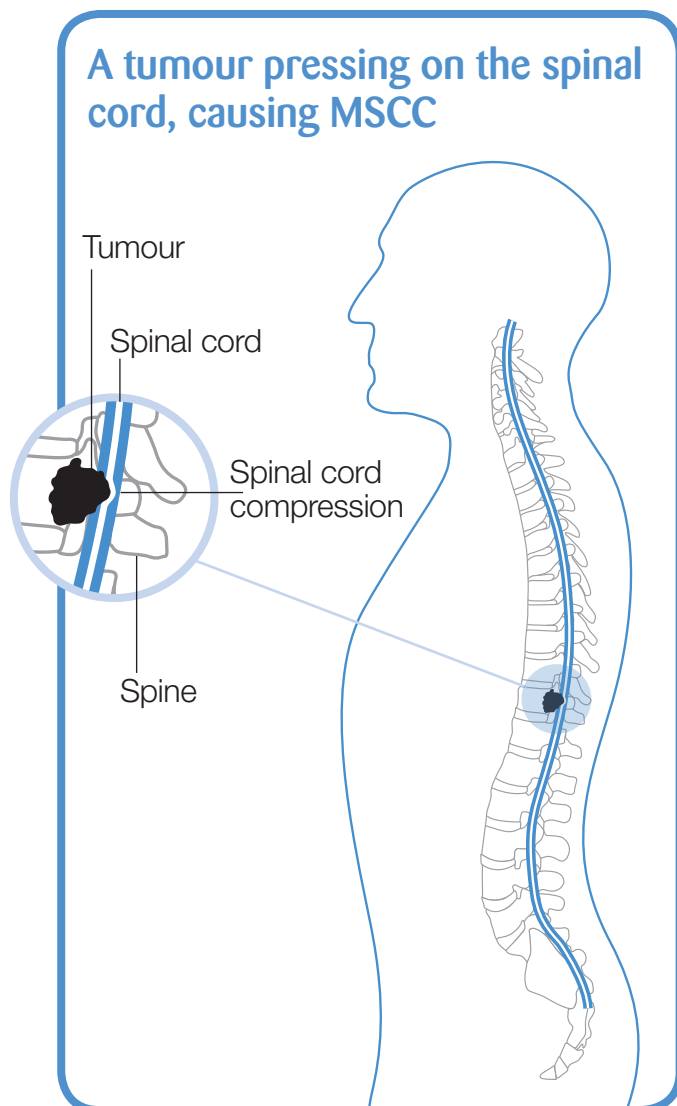
In this fact sheet:

- What is metastatic spinal cord compression (MSCC)?
- What is my risk of developing MSCC?
- What symptoms do I need to watch out for?
- What should I do if I develop symptoms?
- What treatments are available?
- What support is available?
- More information

We have included space for your specialist team to note down details of who you should contact locally if you are worried about MSCC. For more information on MSCC, please speak to your specialist team or call our confidential Helpline on 0800 074 8383.

What is metastatic spinal cord compression (MSCC)?

MSCC happens when cancer cells grow in or near to the spine and press on the spinal cord. The spinal cord is a long thin bundle of nerves and other cells that extends from the brain down the spine. The nerves carry messages between the brain and all parts of the body. These messages allow you to move and to feel things like pain, touch, heat or cold. They also help control body temperature and how your internal organs work. Cancer cells pressing on the spinal cord can cause problems with how these messages are carried. This can cause a range of symptoms (see later).



What is my risk of developing MSCC?

MSCC is very rare and we do not know how many men with prostate cancer develop it. However, we do know it affects between five and ten out of every 100 people (five to ten per cent) with some type of advanced cancer. **Speak to your specialist team for more information about your risk.**

What symptoms do I need to watch out for?

MSCC may cause any of the following symptoms:

- Pain in your lower, middle or upper back or neck that is severe or different from usual pain. Pain may get worse when you cough, sneeze, lift or strain, or go to the toilet, and it may wake you at night or stop you from sleeping
- A narrow 'band' of pain around your tummy or chest
- Pain that moves down your arms or legs
- Weakness in your arms or legs, or difficulty standing or walking
- Numbness or pins and needles in your legs, arms, buttocks, stomach area or chest, that do not go away
- Problems emptying your bladder and/or bowel. You may be unable to empty your bladder and/or bowel, or you may have no control over emptying them

These symptoms may also be caused by other conditions, but it is still important to seek medical advice in case you do have MSCC.

What should I do if I develop symptoms?

If you have one or more of the symptoms listed, you should seek medical advice straight away. Do not wait to see if your symptoms get better and do not worry if it is an inconvenient time, such as the weekend.

Ask your specialist team to fill in the box below with details of who you should contact in your local area:

Who to contact if I develop symptoms of MSCC:

During the day (from ____ am to ____ pm):

At night (from ____ pm to ____ am):

At the weekend (if different to above):

If you do not have details of who to contact, go to your nearest accident and emergency (A & E) department and tell them that you have prostate cancer and symptoms of MSCC. Staff in A & E may not always be familiar with MSCC, so it might be a good idea to take this leaflet or other information about MSCC with you.

Don't wait

It is very important to seek medical advice quickly if you think you might have MSCC because the earlier treatments are started, the lower the risk of long-term symptoms.

What treatments are available?

You may have an MRI scan and/or CT scan of your spine to see whether you show signs of MSCC. If you are diagnosed with MSCC, you will usually start treatment within 24 hours. There are several treatments available, including:

- **A medicine called dexamethasone** (a steroid). This reduces swelling, relieving pressure on the spinal cord. You may take it as a tablet or you may be given it through a drip, which involves running a liquid containing the drug through a fine tube (cannula) into a vein in your arm. You may take a medicine called a proton pump inhibitor alongside dexamethasone to help prevent irritation to your stomach.
- **Lying flat on your back.** This helps to keep your spine still, lowering the chance of long-term effects. Your specialist team will monitor your condition to check whether it is safe for you to gradually sit up.
- **Radiotherapy.** The aim of this treatment is to shrink the tumour that is pressing on your spinal cord.
- **Pain relief.** There are a number of different approaches, including pain-relieving medicines, to help ease pain caused by MSCC and by the cancer in other parts of your body. You can read more about these in our Tool Kit fact sheet, **Pain and advanced prostate cancer**.

- **Surgery.** This usually involves reducing pressure on your spinal cord and stabilising your spine.
- **A support brace.** This helps to keep your spine still.

You may have a combination of treatments. Which treatments are suitable for you will depend on:

- Your fitness and general health
- How severe your symptoms are
- How advanced your cancer is

Your specialist team will assess you, together with any MRI/CT scans you may have had, to help decide which treatments are suitable for you. They will take your personal preferences into account as far as possible. They will then discuss the different treatment options with you to help you decide what is right for you. They will also work with you and your family and/or partner after treatment to help you recover.

What support is available?

You may find it helpful to get some emotional support if you have MSCC or you are worried about developing it. Talking to your specialist team or a specialist cancer nurse such as a Macmillan or Marie Curie nurse can be useful. Or you can call our confidential Helpline on 0800 074 8383.

You may also find it helpful to talk to a partner, friend, or relative about how you are feeling, or to a counsellor. You may be able to get a referral to a counsellor through your GP or specialist team, or you can get a list of private counsellors from the UK Council for Psychotherapy (contact details are at the end of this fact sheet). Partners and families may also find it helpful to get some emotional support.

You can speak to someone who has experience of advanced prostate cancer through our one-to-one support service. Please call the Helpline on 0800 074 8383 for more information. If you have access to the internet, you can sign up to The Prostate Cancer Charity Online Community, where you can share your views and experiences with others affected by prostate cancer. You can also find details of local support groups where you can meet others face to face. Our website address is www.prostate-cancer.org.uk

More information

CancerHelp UK

www.cancerhelp.org.uk

Freephone 0808 800 4040

Part of Cancer Research UK, Cancer Help provides information about cancer, including information about metastatic spinal cord compression.

Macmillan Cancer Support

www.macmillan.org.uk

Freephone 0808 808 00 00

Provides advice and support to anyone affected by cancer. They also run a specialist cancer nursing service.

Marie Curie Cancer Care

www.mariecurie.org.uk

Freeephone 0800 716 146

Runs hospice centres throughout the UK and provides a free nursing service for patients in their own homes.

UK Council for Psychotherapy

www.psychotherapy.org.uk

020 7014 9955

Holds a national register of psychotherapists and counsellors and provides information to help you choose a therapist.

Reviewed by:

- Nicola James, Macmillan Nurse Consultant, Cancer Care, Chesterfield NHS Foundation Trust
- Patricia McClurey, Specialist Nurse Prostate Cancer, James Cook University Hospital, Middlesbrough
- Rachel Sharkey, Macmillan Clinical Nurse Specialist Urological Cancers, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, London
- Alistair Thomson, Consultant Clinical Oncologist, Royal Cornwall Hospital, Truro
- Fred Tuck, Oncology Clinical Nurse Specialist, Macmillan Unit, West Suffolk Hospital NHS Trust, Bury St Edmonds
- Prostate Cancer Voices
- The Prostate Cancer Charity Support & Information Specialist Nurses

Written and edited by:

The Prostate Cancer Charity
Information Team

Tell us what you think

We hope you have found this information useful. If you have any comments or suggestions about any of our publications, you can email literature@prostate-cancer.org.uk or write to The Information team at The Prostate Cancer Charity, 100 Cambridge Grove, London W6 0LE



The Prostate Cancer Charity makes every effort to make sure that its services provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate facts about prostate cancer. We hope that these will add to the medical advice you have already been given and will help you to make any decisions you may face. Please do continue to talk to your doctor if you are worried about any medical issues.

The Prostate Cancer Charity funds research into the causes of, and treatments for, prostate cancer. We also provide support and information to anyone concerned about prostate cancer. We rely on charitable donations to continue this work. If you would like to make a donation, please call us on 020 8222 7666.

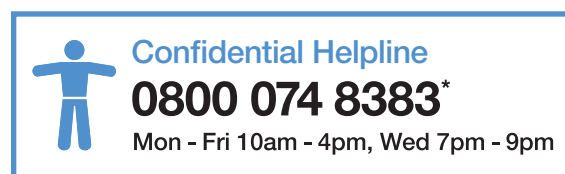
The Prostate Cancer Charity

First Floor, Cambridge House,
100 Cambridge Grove, London W6 0LE
Email: info@prostate-cancer.org.uk
Telephone: 020 8222 7622

The Prostate Cancer Charity Scotland

Unit F22-24 Festival Business Centre,
150 Brand Street, Glasgow G51 1DH
Email: scotland@prostate-cancer.org.uk
Telephone: 0141 314 0050

Website: www.prostate-cancer.org.uk



Email: helpline@prostate-cancer.org.uk

© The Prostate Cancer Charity February 2011
To be reviewed February 2013

*Calls are occasionally recorded for training purposes only. Confidentiality is maintained between callers and The Prostate Cancer Charity.

A charity registered in England and Wales (1005541) and Scotland (SC039332). Registered company 2653887.

#639/MSCCMAR11