

# CES-AS

## Cauda Equina Syndrome in Ankylosing Spondylitis

### What is it?

Cauda equina syndrome (CES), a rare disorder, is the neurological consequence of the compression of the spinal canal in the lower or lumbar spine. The canal in the lumbar spine contains bunches of nerve roots that resemble (to the eye of the old school of anatomists) the tail of a horse, i.e., cauda equina. An extension of the brain, these nerves send and receive messages to and from the pelvic organs and lower limbs. CES occurs when these nerve roots are compressed, affecting function of the pelvic organs and sensation and movement in the legs.

### What happens?

The most common cause of CES is a disc that ruptures into the canal, as opposed to the more typical rupture toward the side. Tumors can do it, too. It is a very rare complication of aggressive, long-standing AS. The underlying disease of AS is a process that damages the spine, causing the bone to soften, even to turn to a soft granulation tissue. Usually, the tissue surrounding the bone responds with calcification of the ligaments, and the process balances. Sometimes, however, the destructive process is so violent that so much granulation tissue forms that it compresses the spinal cord.

### What are the warning signs?

- Bladder and/or bowel dysfunction, causing you to retain waste or be unable to hold it.

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Symptoms can lead to permanent paralysis, impaired bladder and bowel control, loss of sexual sensation and other problems.

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- Severe or progressive problems in the lower extremities, including loss of or altered sensation between the legs, over the buttocks, inner thighs and back of the legs (saddle area), and feet/heels.
- Pain, numbness or weakness spreading to one or both legs that may cause you to stumble.

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### Who can help?

A team of experts should include an experienced rheumatologist, an orthopedic surgeon and a knowledgeable neurosurgeon.

Multiple study outcomes and treatments recently analysed strongly suggest that surgical remedies should be attempted, and that leaving a person untreated or treated with steroids alone is inappropriate.

### Is there hope on the horizon?

The condition is too rare to know whether TNF-a blockers will halt this process. It has been suggested that they may well do so – and so might some of the drugs called bisphosphonates currently under study.

**Note:** If you have experience with CES-AS and would like to share your story with others, please contact us at 800-777-8189 ext. 223. Thank you.

### REFERENCES:

Journal of Spinal Disorders, Vol 14, No 5, 2001, pp 427-433 Cauda Equina Syndrome in AS (The CES-AS Syndrome): Meta-analysis of outcomes after medical and surgical treatments. Nicholas U. Ahn, Uri M. Ahn, Elizabeth S. Garrett et al., Department of Orthopedic Surgery, Johns Hopkins University, and Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Baltimore, Maryland, USA

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Please contact the Cauda Equina Syndrome Support Group (CESSG) at [www.caudaequina.org](http://www.caudaequina.org). They can provide support and additional educational materials.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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