

Myelopathy

TERMINOLOGY

- Spinal cord disease
- Myelitis
- Spinal cord disorder

INTRODUCTION

Myelopathy is a general term that refers to a disorder or disease, which compromises the spinal cord. The term myelopathy is also used to describe any neurological deficit related to the spinal cord itself. Myelopathy is very different from radiculopathy (nerve root) compromise, which is caused by isolated compromise of individual spinal nerve roots.

The most frequent cause of myelopathy is compression of the spinal cord by osteophyte or extruded disc material in the cervical spine. Myelopathy does not commonly occur with low back pain because the spinal cord normally ends at the approximate level of the 12 thoracic or 1st lumbar vertebral body after which point only descending nerve roots occupy the spinal canal. The spinal cord does not occur the spinal canal in the lower portion of the low back (lumbar region).

PREVALENCE

The general prevalence of myelopathy has not been well established due to the numerous causes. Most cases of myelopathy due not involve an isolated injury, but represent gradual compression of the spinal cord secondary to spinal stenosis or a lesion such as a tumor.

The prevalence of spinal cord injury (SCI) is not well known in many large countries. In some countries, such as Sweden and Iceland, registries are available. About 259,000 people in the United States live with spinal cord injury, and there are about 12,000 new spinal cord injuries every year. The majority of spinal cord injuries (~80%) involve males between the ages of 16-40 and result from motor vehicle accidents (42%), violence, (27%), falls, (15%), or sports related 7%. Although these numbers and percentages change year by year, it is clear that SCI predominately involves young males. Statistics for SCI in veterans also changes year by year depending on the level of American troop combat.