

# Cauda Equina Syndrome (CES)

An unusual emergency condition affecting the lumbar spine

# Basic details

- An unusual emergency spinal condition
- Usually affects young patients
- Often due to a massive disc prolapse compressing all of the nerves in the lumbar spinal canal
- Often associated with back pain and leg pain – may be 1 leg or both legs
- Hallmark is numbness in “saddle” area – around anus, perineum, genitals
- And loss of bladder sensation, with initially painless urinary retention and then incontinence

# Cause

- Usually due to a massive acute (fresh) disc prolapse
- Most suspected CES are refuted following emergency MRI (ie lots of false alarms)
- Other rarer causes include spinal infection (epidural abscess), bleeds (epidural haematoma eg after epidural anaesthesia, or spontaneous in anticoagulated patients, tumours. All of these have features that can be identified in the clinical assessment

# Management

- Emergency MRI Lumbar spine is needed for suspected CES
- If confirmed – emergency discectomy is needed
- Delays can result in permanent disability:
  - Leg weakness or numbness
  - Incontinence
  - Loss of sexual function
- These cases need to be done in NHS due to the emergency nature

# MRI for massive disc prolapse causing CES

No CSF – all disc!

