



## A neurosurgical emergency

The nerves that provide motor and sensory function to the pelvic organs and legs are called the cauda equina.

They are a continuation of the spinal cord and are located within the spinal canal in the lumbar spine.

Cauda equina syndrome, occurs when there is compression of these nerves, either by osteoarthritis or a large disc herniation. This is a neurosurgical emergency and requires surgical decompression.

Symptoms are: urinary retention and incontinence; saddle numbness including the genitals and anus; sexual dysfunction; pain or weakness in the lower limbs; and a foot drop.

Cauda equina syndrome is usually diagnosed with a neurological physical exam, MRI and CT scan and requires emergency surgical intervention to decompress the nerves and give the patient the best chance of recovery.

If left untreated, it can result in permanent paralysis or incontinence.

If these symptoms are of concern, arrange a referral to a neurosurgeon through your GP or present to your nearest emergency department for assessment.

