

Cauda Equina Syndrome

A guide to compensation

Expert advice

Cauda Equina Syndrome (CES) is a serious lower back condition which occurs when the nerves at the base of the spinal cord are damaged. CES requires immediate medical attention.

Cauda equina means “horses tail”. The cauda equina is a bundle of nerves at the base of the spine which are responsible for providing the legs with signals to control the muscles and provide sensation. The nerves are also responsible for normal bowel and bladder sensations and function. CES can be difficult to diagnose because symptoms can develop gradually and vary in intensity. However, the onset of any of the symptoms requires urgent medical attention.

What are the symptoms of CES?

CES can present with one or more of the following symptoms, commonly referred to as “red flags”:

- Pain, numbness, tingling sensations and/or weakness in one or both legs
- Saddle anaesthesia – loss of feeling/numbness between the legs or around the back passage
- Bowel dysfunction – inability to stop bowel movement, constipation, loss of sensation when passing a bowel movement
- Bladder dysfunction – inability to urinate, loss of sensation when passing urine, inability to stop or control urination, loss of full bladder sensation
- Sexual dysfunction
- Severe back pain
- Motor weakness and loss of reflex(es)

Although these 'red flag' symptoms can be caused by other medical conditions, if one or more symptoms are present, CES should be investigated and no time should be wasted in urgently referring and attending Accident & Emergency.

Immediate surgery significantly increases the prospects of recovery, especially in the first 24–36 hours of the onset of symptoms.

How is CES diagnosed and treated?

CES is clinically diagnosed with a physical examination and neurological evaluation. Radiological testing such as CT and MRI scanning can document the compressed spinal cord tissue.

Treatment involves relieving the pressure on the nerves. Patients with CES need urgent surgery to help reduce the risks of long-term problems. The most commonly performed operation is a laminectomy which involves removing part of the vertebra (backbone). This creates a space, thereby releasing the pressure on the nerves that have been compressed.



What cases of CES result in a medical negligence claim?

A delay in the diagnosis of CES can lead to devastating consequences due to the neurological damage caused. A delay in performing surgery can lead to the following permanent conditions:

- Severe pain and discomfort
- Mobility problems
- Loss of sensation in legs and feet
- Irreversible loss of bowel and/or bladder control
- Sexual dysfunction

Often CES is not considered as a possible diagnosis despite a patient presenting with one or more of the recognised symptoms. It's a rare condition but 'red flag' symptoms should be identified by doctors and appropriate investigations into CES undertaken as a matter of urgency.

A failure by a doctor to consider a diagnosis of CES in the presence of one or more of these symptoms could result in a clinical negligence claim and legal advice should be sought in these circumstances.

Please feel free to discuss your own position and concerns. Contact your nearest office on:

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Advice on making a claim for compensation

For those who don't have experience of the legal process, contacting a lawyer and making a claim for compensation can be a daunting prospect. However, we're with our clients every step of the way, ensuring they understand the claims process, and relieving the burden of having to deal with a variety of practical issues, at what can be a difficult time.



What should you do if you think you have a claim?

Contact us. Our team of specialists have a vast amount of experience in dealing with medical negligence claims.

Once we've taken details, we'll confirm whether or not you have a claim. If you're entitled to compensation, we can start work on your case straightaway and begin gathering evidence.

Time limits apply when making a claim for compensation, so don't delay in contacting us.

What is the cost of making a claim?

We understand that the cost of legal advice can be a worry, but there are options available to fund medical negligence claims.

You may have legal expenses insurance under an existing insurance policy which entitles you to free representation. If legal expenses insurance is not in place, we may be able to conduct your case under a Conditional Fee Agreement, also known as a 'No Win, No Fee' Agreement. This means if the case fails, no payment is due. There are certain medical negligence cases where Legal Aid may be available.

Once we know the circumstances of your claim, we'll be able to discuss your funding options in more detail.

What is the amount of compensation likely to be?

Compensation will be based on the severity of the injury, and also on the personal circumstances of the injured person. For example, if they are unable to work as a result of the injury, loss of earnings may be accounted for. If they were responsible for household chores or caring for a dependent and are no longer able to, the cost of assistance will be taken into account. If rehabilitation, treatment, aids, equipment or adaptations are required, we will also seek to recover these costs.

How long is the case likely to take?

Every case is different so it's difficult to estimate how long a case is likely to take without first reviewing the circumstances. However, the case will be dealt with by an expert in medical negligence who will deal with the case as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Frequently asked questions

Will I have to go to court?

It's very rare that a medical negligence case will actually go to trial. A large majority of cases settle before a trial takes place. However, if the case doesn't settle before trial, attendance at court may be necessary.

What if the injury requires rehabilitation or treatment?

As we have many years' experience working on behalf of people who have suffered serious injuries, we see it as an important part of our role to make sure that our clients get the best quality support to maximise the chances of recovery and future independence. We work closely with case managers, medical experts and approved rehabilitation providers to ensure that a tailored programme is put in place as soon as possible so rehabilitation can begin without delay.

What if I live outside the UK?

If you live outside the UK, or if the medical negligence occurred whilst outside the UK, it may still be possible to claim for compensation. We have a team of experts who deal with claims for injuries which occurred outside the UK. They understand the laws which apply and the complex procedure involved.

What if I need assistance in other areas?

We have expert lawyers in many areas of law such as family, employment, welfare benefits, trusts, Court of Protection and disability rights and work closely with those departments to ensure that you get the best possible outcome.