

Numbness

Patients often complain of numbness or changed sensation in a limb. If it is in the distribution of the nerve root as it leaves the spine, then it may suggest a problem with that nerve, but if it is more generalised then there may be another neurological problem. Sometimes when numbness has been a problem and the pressure is taken off a nerve by an operation then numbness may persist for a while and does not always recover. Rarely, operations are done for numbness alone, rather for pain and usually the numbness is the last thing to recover.

Assessment

A full history and examination needs to be taken and then further tests organised if indicated. Besides imaging (MRI, XR, CT) other tests such as blood tests or nerve conduction studies may be requested (these are done at Frenchay), especially if the problem is felt to be due to the nerve away from the spine or a more generalised problem e.g. diabetes. If evidence of nerve compression in the spine is found and there is no evidence of compression of the nerve in the limbs then a referral is usually made onwards to a neurologist to see if there is a problem with the nerves themselves.