# Spine Referral Checklist

Who to refer, how fast, and what to send

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## SAME DAY

**Send to Emergency now**

- Saddle numbness
- New urinary retention or incontinence, or bowel change
- Rapidly progressing leg or arm weakness
- Back pain with fever, IV drug use or immunosuppression
- Spinal trauma with any neurological signs

## WITHIN 1 WEEK

**Urgent spine referral**

- New leg or arm weakness, even if stable (e.g. foot drop)
- Signs of cervical myelopathy: clumsy hands, unsteady gait, positive Hoffmann's
- Back pain with a cancer history, weight loss or night pain
- Suspected osteoporotic fracture with severe pain or new neurological signs

## ROUTINE

**Spine clinic**

- Sciatica or arm pain beyond 6 weeks despite conservative care
- Walking limited by leg pain that eases on sitting (neurogenic claudication)
- An MRI report you're unsure how to interpret
- Patient asking for a surgical opinion or a second opinion

## MANAGE IN PRIMARY CARE

**Review if not improving**

- Back pain only, under 6 weeks, no red flags: reassurance, analgesia, stay active. No MRI needed yet.

### 30-second exam

- Heel walk and toe walk
- Big toe extension power, both sides
- Knee and ankle reflexes
- Hoffmann's sign, tandem gait (if neck or hand symptoms)
- Saddle sensation (if bladder or bowel symptoms)

### What to send with the referral

- [ ] Where the pain goes: back only, or below the knee/elbow
- [ ] How long, and what has been tried
- [ ] Any weakness: side and severity
- [ ] Bladder, bowel or saddle symptoms (a "no" helps too)
- [ ] Imaging done, with the report. No MRI yet? Refer anyway.

### Refer or ask about a case

**WhatsApp: +60 18-871 1928**

**KPJ Damansara Specialist Hospital** · Mon 8.30–10.30am, Tue–Fri 8.30am–4.30pm, Sat 8.30am–12pm

**Columbia Asia Hospital Seremban** · Mondays, 1–5pm

Download this checklist: dryeesv.com/gp

**Urgent case? WhatsApp directly. Don't wait for the letter.**

Scan to WhatsApp

A general guide for referring clinicians. It does not replace clinical judgement. · Updated November 2026