

# WebMD

WebMD is an American corporation known primarily as an online [publisher](#) of [news](#) and information pertaining to human health and well-being. The site includes information pertaining to drugs. It is one of the top healthcare websites by unique visitors. It was founded in [1996](#) by internet entrepreneur Jeff Arnold.

The most widely cited symptom checker, [WebMD](#), was used to characterise the [differential diagnosis](#) for [Degenerative cervical myelopathy](#) symptoms.

31 classical DCM symptoms were identified, of which 14 (45%) listed DCM as a differential and 3 (10%) placed DCM in the top third of the differential. The mean differential rank for motor symptoms was significantly better than for arthritic symptoms ( $P = .0093$ ) and the average differential rank for all symptoms ( $P = .048$ ). The symptom checker WebMD performed best at recognising DCM, placing it nearer the top of the differential list (average rank of 5.6) than both Healthline (rank of 12.9,  $P = .015$ ) and Healthtools.AARP (rank of 15.5,  $P = .0014$ ). On WebMD, only one combination of symptoms resulted in DCM as the primary differential: neck, shoulder and arm pain with hand weakness. 151 differential diagnoses for DCM symptoms were recorded on WebMD. Multiple sclerosis and peripheral neuropathy were the most common differentials, shortlisted for 52% and 32% of DCM symptoms respectively.

DCM symptoms perform poorly in online symptom checkers and lead to a large differential of many other common conditions. Whilst a diagnosis becomes more likely as the number of symptoms increases, this will not support much needed earlier diagnosis. Symptom checkers remain an attractive concept with potential. Further research is required to support their optimisation <sup>1)</sup>.

1)

Davies BM, Munro CF, Kotter M. A Novel Insight into the Challenges of Diagnosing Degenerative Cervical Myelopathy using Online Symptom Checkers. J Med Internet Res. 2018 Jul 30. doi: 10.2196/10868. [Epub ahead of print] PubMed PMID: 30300137.

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