

Lumbar Laminectomy

NS02 Lite - Expires end of January 2024



This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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What is lumbar spinal stenosis?

Lumbar spinal stenosis is where the spinal canal narrows in your lower back.

The spinal canal tends to narrow as we get older caused by bony overgrowth from wear and tear in the facet joints, thickening of surrounding ligaments and bulging of the discs.

A narrowed spinal canal means that there is not enough space for the nerves and blood vessels. You may have difficulty walking and leg pain, often with a tingling sensation.

What are the benefits of surgery?

The aim is to prevent your symptoms getting worse. You may get less pain and be able to walk further. Some people have a major improvement.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

If your symptoms are mild, you may not need any treatment. If your symptoms are severe or are getting worse, surgery is usually the only option.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation or the operation is delayed?

Your symptoms are unlikely to get worse quickly. For a few patients their symptoms will even get better with time.

If you develop any of the following symptoms, contact your healthcare team.

- Reduced dexterity. Common symptoms are difficulty using cutlery, being unable to do up buttons or a change in your handwriting.
- Poor balance and increased falls especially when getting up from a seated position.
- New weakness.
- Increased pain.

What does the operation involve?

Various anaesthetic techniques are possible.

The operation usually takes 1 to 2 hours.

Your surgeon will make a vertical cut on the centre of your lower back. They will part the muscles to get to your spine. Your surgeon will

remove enough bone and ligament tissue to open up the narrowed part of the canal, giving the nerves and blood vessels more room.

How can I prepare myself for the operation?

If you smoke, stopping smoking now may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health. Nicotine is known to prevent wounds from healing properly following lower-back surgery, and increases the risk of unsightly scarring and chronic pain.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Speak to the healthcare team about any vaccinations you might need to reduce your risk of serious illness while you recover. When you come into hospital, practise social distancing and hand washing and wear a face covering when asked.

What complications can happen?

General complications of any operation

- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication
- Difficulty passing urine
- Blood clot in your leg
- Blood clot in your lung
- Chest infection
- Heart attack or stroke

Specific complications of this operation

- Worse pain or numbness down your leg
- Numbness between your legs, loss of normal bowel and bladder control and, for men, problems having an erection

- Neuropathic pain. This is a burning pain that may happen once the pressure on the nerves has been released
- Tear of the thin membrane that covers the nerves in your spine
- Infection in your spine
- Spinal instability

Consequences of this procedure

- Pain
- Unsightly scarring of your skin

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home after 1 to 2 days.

Do not lift anything heavy or twist your body. Make sure you keep a good posture when sitting and walking.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Spinal stenosis can sometimes come back at the same place or at a different place in your spine.

Summary

Lumbar spinal stenosis is where the spinal canal narrows in your lower back. This may cause pain or weakness in your legs. The aim of surgery is to prevent your symptoms getting worse.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

Acknowledgements

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