

Cervical Laminectomy

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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 cervical spinal stenosis?

Cervical spinal stenosis is where the spinal canal narrows in your neck.

The spinal cord passes down the spinal canal from your brain. Nerves from your spinal cord and blood vessels that supply the nerves pass into the spinal canal within the vertebrae.

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 in your neck can press on your spinal cord, preventing it from working properly.

What are the benefits of surgery?

The aim is to prevent further damage to your spinal cord. Surgery cannot repair damage to your spinal cord but your symptoms may improve.

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 does the operation involve?

Various anaesthetic techniques are possible. The operation usually takes 1 to 2 hours.

Your surgeon will make a cut on the centre of the back of your neck. 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 spinal cord 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 neck 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?

Some complications can be serious and can even cause death.

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

- Neuropathic pain. This is a burning pain that may happen once the pressure on the nerves has been released
- Injury to your spinal cord and nerves
- Infection in your spine
- Damage to the nerve roots
- Tear of the thin membrane that covers the nerves in your spine
- Spinal instability

Consequences of this procedure

- Pain
- Unsightly scarring

How soon will I recover?

Keep your wound dry for ten days.

You should be able to go home after 2 to 3 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.

Most people make a good recovery from surgery.

Summary

Cervical spinal stenosis is where the spinal canal narrows in your neck, causing weakness or numbness in your arms and legs. The aim of surgery is to prevent further damage to your spinal cord.

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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