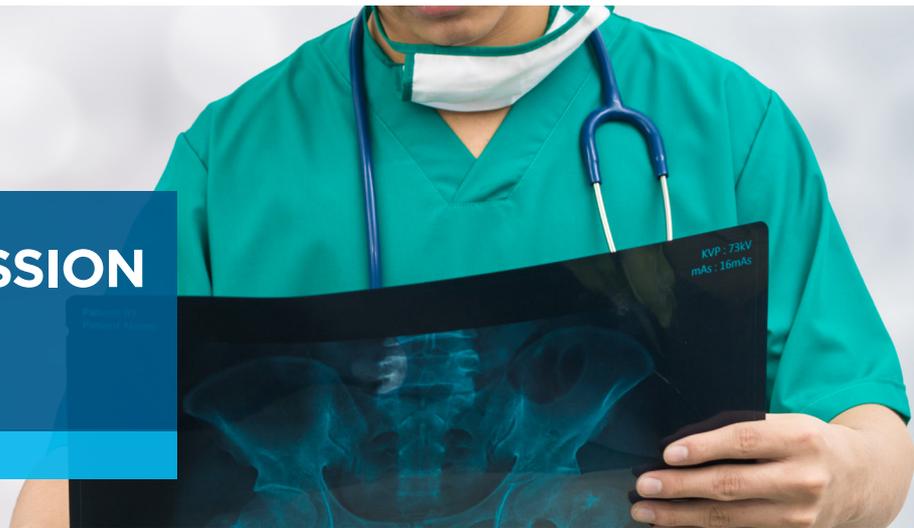


## LUMBAR DECOMPRESSION SURGERY



### Introduction

Lumbar decompression is a type of surgery that includes several different procedures. All of these procedures have the common goal of taking pressure off the spinal cord and its nerves.<sup>1</sup>

The decision to have surgery should be taken under the advice of a doctor or specialist, with careful consideration of the benefits, risks, and complications.

### Procedure for lumbar decompression surgery

The procedure followed depends on several factors, including the cause and severity of lumbar compression, and the physical condition of each individual. In many cases, a combination of different procedures is used.

#### Discectomy

A discectomy removes part of the disc that is putting pressure on the adjacent spinal nerves.<sup>1</sup> Because discs help the spine to absorb shock, only the section of disc necessary to relieve pressure will be removed.<sup>3</sup>

#### Laminectomy/ Laminotomy

A laminotomy removes part of the lamina (the protective bony arches that support the back of the spine). In the case of laminectomy, all of the lamina is removed.<sup>1,3</sup>

#### Foraminectomy/ Foraminotomy

Foramina are the small protective openings on each side of the spine allow the nerves to connect with the body. If these openings are severely narrowed, a foraminotomy may be necessary to remove blocking or constricting bone or tissue. A formaminectomy is similar, but more extensive.<sup>1</sup>

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## Facetectomy

A facetectomy is performed where it is necessary to remove bone from under the facets (small joints) in the spine.<sup>2</sup>

## Spinal fusion

A type of surgery known as spinal fusion may also be performed at the same time as certain lumbar decompression procedures, when an individual requires greater spinal stability.

## Open surgery versus micro endoscopic surgery

Certain individuals might be eligible for a less invasive surgical option, known as “micro endoscopic surgery”, “minimally invasive surgery”, or “keyhole surgery”.

Micro endoscopic surgery is a highly complex, guided surgery technique that aims to shorten recovery time. As opposed to traditional “open” surgery, the incision made in the back is much smaller, with the actual operation carried out by tiny surgical instruments inserted through this incision, conveyed by camera back to a video monitor for the surgeon, who guides the instruments’ movements and actions.<sup>3</sup>

Micro endoscopic is not a suitable option for all individuals, and its safety and effectiveness have not been demonstrated over the long term. While there are clear advantages and benefits, there is a slightly higher risk of accidental injury and complications.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, recent research found that this type of surgery was not as effective in producing pain relief and improvement in quality of life as traditional methods and had higher rates of rehospitalization.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, micro endoscopic surgery is not usually covered in most Cigna insurance plans, and is considered on an individual basis.



## Effectiveness of lumbar decompression surgery

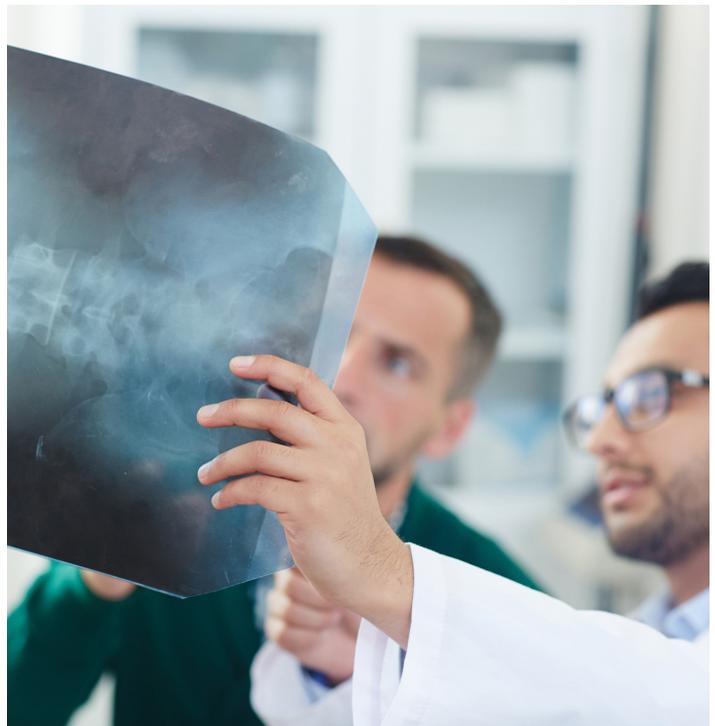
Lumbar decompression surgery may provide short-term relief for many individuals (65-70%) and may improve the ability of many people to walk for longer distances than before surgery.<sup>2</sup> However, the scientific and medical communities continue to debate the long-term effectiveness of these procedures.

For example, one study found improved results over a four year period for individuals undergoing laminectomy surgery for spinal stenosis. However these benefits have not been proven to last beyond six to eight years.<sup>5</sup> Another study found no difference in improvement or pain relief between individuals who had undergone the same procedure for their stenosis and those who had followed a physical therapy program.<sup>6</sup>

For procedures involving spinal disc decompression due to prolapse — slipped discs — the likelihood of recurrence is 7% to 15%. This is the same as for individuals who do not undergo surgery.<sup>2</sup>

## Alternatives to lumbar decompression surgery

For many spinal conditions, surgery is not generally recommended as a first option. With rare exceptions, non-surgical treatments are always preferable, at least for the first three months after the onset of symptoms. Only if there is no relief or improvement should surgery be considered.



## Risks, complications and preparing for lumbar decompression surgery

All operations carry the risk of complications and side effects. For more information on the possible risks and complications of lumbar surgery, including what to expect and how to prepare please refer to our general surgery guide.

### Questions about your diagnosis?

#### Unsure which treatment is right for you?

Did you know you have access to a free, independent and confidential decision support service?

Discuss your concerns and have your case reviewed by a specialist in your condition.

The decision is yours. And we're with you all the way.



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