

Lumbar Discectomy: Before Your Surgery

Your spine is basically a long stack of bones.

The stacked bones are called vertebrae.

Each bone, or vertebra, has a hole in the middle.

This area is called the spinal canal.

It also has little openings on the sides.

These openings are called foramina.

Your spinal cord runs through the spinal canal.

Nerves that branch off from the spinal cord run through the foramina on the sides of each vertebra.

The vertebrae are also cushioned by small, spongy discs that help protect your spine and keep it flexible.

But when a disc is damaged, it can bulge or break open.

This is called a herniated disc.

Sometimes the bulging tissue presses on the nerves that leave the foramina or presses directly on the spinal cord itself.

This causes pain or weakness in your back or leg.

If your symptoms aren't getting better or are getting worse— and other treatment hasn't helped— your doctor may recommend a discectomy to remove the bulging tissue.

It's often done as a microdiscectomy, which uses a special microscope to view the disc and nerves.

Here's how the surgery is done.

Before and during the surgery, you will get medicine so you won't feel any pain.

The doctor will make a small cut, or incision, over your spine.

While looking through a microscope, the doctor then inserts small tools through the incision to do the surgery.

At first, your doctor may need to remove a small amount of bone and other tissue from the spine.

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This helps them see the area around the disc.

Then the doctor removes the bulging disc material.

To finish the surgery, your incisions will be closed with a bandage and stitches, staples, skin glue, or tape strips.

Before the surgery, tell your doctor about all the medicines and natural health products you take, especially blood thinners, like aspirin.

Some can raise the risk of bleeding or cause problems with anesthesia.

Your doctor will tell you which medicines to take or stop before surgery.

And follow your doctor's directions for preparing for your surgery, including when you should stop eating and drinking.

Bring your photo ID, health insurance card, and any paperwork your hospital may have asked for.

Be sure you have someone to take you home.

Anesthesia and pain medicine will make it unsafe for you to drive or get home on your own.

You also may need someone to help you at home for a few days or weeks or until you have more energy and can move around better.

The thought of having back surgery may be stressful, but knowing what to expect and how to prepare can help.

And if you have any questions or concerns, you can always call your doctor.