

Cervical Foramenotomy

What is a Foramenomy ?

This is when the lamina and the spinous process are removed. This may need to be done at one ore more levels.

Why is this usually done ?

Because you have arm pain. There is commonly a spur or disc pressing on the nerve.

How is this usually done ?

This may be done from behind. There is removal of the bone with a high speed drill. It may be done in association with a laminectomy.

Can this be done on both sides ?

Most surgeons would do it at multiple levels but would try not to do it on both sides at the same level.

How common is this type of surgery ?

This is a common procedure for some neurosurgeons but is rarely performed by an orthopaedic surgeon.

How much of the bone is removed ?

This usually involves the side of one facet joint and some of the adjacent lamina.

What is the chance of the bone growing back ?

Very unlikely but over the passage of 5 years or more bone can regrow.

Will removing the bone make my neck unstable ?

Not unless you have too much of the joint removed.

If I have a spondylolisthesis and have a foramenotomy is there a risk of making the spondylolisthesis worse ?

Yes. It depends on the underlying stability of the spine at that point prior to the surgery.

How much better will I be ?

This will depend on a number of things.

If your nerve is very badly compressed prior to the surgery you may see no improvement. Most are significantly better. The general rule for improvement is that the pain gets better first. The weakness will improve next. How long this will take depends on how damaged the nerve is and how much thinning has occurred in your muscles. The last thing to get better is the numbness. Typically the numbness will take a long time (up to 12 months) and may never completely recover.

Will all the pain go away ?

It may not.

Could the pain get worse ?

Yes! Sometimes when your have had very bad compression the nerves can wake up with numbness that has a burning unpleasant nature to it.

What is the chance of a needing surgery at another level ?

Yes we can see the development of stenosis at the levels around your surgery. This was usually present to a degree prior to your surgery but not bad enough at the time to require treatment.

Can I get back to relatively normal activity post operatively ?

Yes !

Can I go back to playing active sport ?

In time yes. Most surgeons would suggest avoiding contact sport in the recovery period.

What protects the spinal nerve when the bone is removed ?

There is still a large amount of muscle closed over the top

What are the common complications from a posterior approach ?

Muscle thinning / nerve root injury / infection

Is the a chance of quadriplegia ?

Yes

Could I need further surgery ?

Yes!

Will I have to wear a neck brace (collar) ?

With single level surgery this would be unusual. Some patients will wear one for comfort.