

Lumbar Laminectomy

What is a Laminectomy ?

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

Why is this usually done ?

Because you have sciatica / leg weakness / cauda equina compression. Usually this is because the spinal canal is too narrow (usually from spinal canal stenosis). It may be done to remove a very large disc prolapse.

How is this usually done ?

This may be done by removal of the bone with a high speed drill or with the combination of chisel and a laminectomy punch.

How common is this type of surgery ?

This and micro-discectomy are the commonest form of spinal surgery.

How much of the bone is removed ?

This usually extends from the side of one facet joint to the side of the opposite joint. It is often necessary to remove part of the joints on either side to decompress the nerves.

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 back unstable ?

Not unless the joints on either side have too much of the joint removed or if you already have failure of the joints causing a slip of one vertebra on another (called spondylolisthesis). It can also occur if the disc itself fails and this can cause instability.

If I have a spondylolisthesis and have a laminectomy 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 nerves are 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 you 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 level above 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 is my chance of needing a lumbar fusion ?

This will depend on the underlying state of your spine and if this is reasonable then the chance is small.

What protects the spinal nerves when the bone is removed ?

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