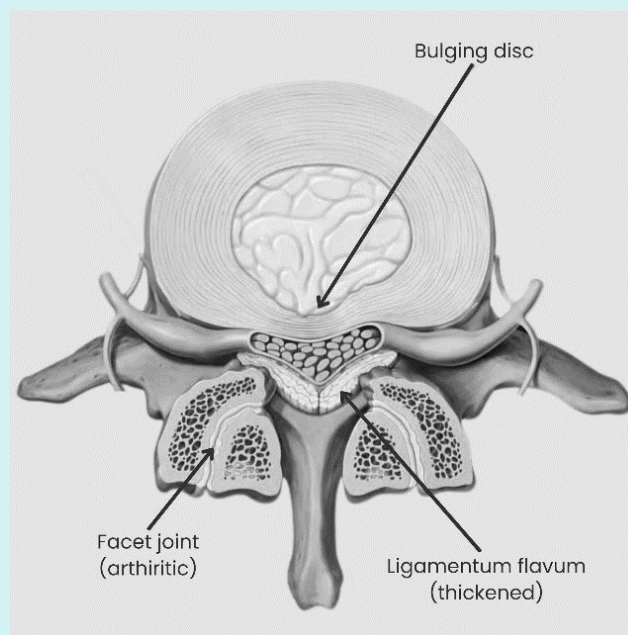


Information leaflet

Lumbar decompression (V2560/2)

You have been added to the waiting list for a procedure called a lumbar decompression. This is an operation performed on the lower back.

The small joints of your back can develop wear and tear (arthritic) changes. This can cause narrowing of the spinal canal. The spinal canal is the part of your spine that contains the spinal nerves.



When these nerves don't have enough space, you can get pain or heaviness in the legs. These symptoms are often worse when you walk. The procedure aims to relieve the leg symptoms caused by pressure on the spinal nerves. It is not an operation to cure low back pain although sometimes back symptoms do improve.

What happens during the procedure?

On the day of your procedure, you will see Mr Bateman to confirm you still wish to proceed. He may ask you to confirm your symptoms again. Your anaesthetist will also see you and give you further details about your anaesthetic.

You will be asked to change into a gown and wait on the ward prior to your operation. When it is your turn you will walk to the operating theatre with a nurse to guide you. You will lie on a bed, on your back and be given a general anaesthetic.

Once asleep, you will be rolled onto your front on a special operation table. Your skin is cleaned with antiseptic solution and sterile covers applied. A needle is inserted and an x-ray image taken to confirm the level of your operation.

A small cut is made in the skin and the muscles of your back are moved aside. A window is made in the bone and ligaments of your back. This is done with special instruments. A further x-ray is taken at this time to ensure that the correct level is treated.

Ligament and bone spurs that press on the spinal nerves are removed. The nerves are checked to make sure the pressure has been removed. The wound is then closed with dissolving stitches and tissue glue. A dressing is applied to cover the area.

After the procedure you will be gently rolled onto your back and moved to a bed in the recovery area. Later on you will be moved back to the ward. The procedure usually takes around 1 to 2 hours but the whole process can take longer. The operation will be longer if more than one section of the spine is being treated.

What are the risks?

Lumbar decompression is generally considered a safe procedure. As with any operation there is a small risk of complications. These may only be rare but you need to be aware of what can go wrong before you agree to the procedure.

- You will have a scar on your back.
- Approximately 10 - 20% of patients have ongoing leg symptoms after what is technically a successful operation. It is not always known why this happens.
- The risk of infection is around 1 - 2%. A superficial wound infection usually settles readily with antibiotics. A deep infection is potentially more difficult to treat and may require prolonged antibiotics and even further surgery.
- There is usually only a small amount of blood loss with this procedure but heavy bleeding can occur. Very rarely patients may require a blood transfusion. Major vessel injury is a rare but potentially life-threatening complication.
- Deep vein thrombosis is another possible problem. It is very uncommon but can go to the lungs and cause serious or life threatening problems. To reduce your risk you will be given special stockings to wear. You should move your legs and feet as soon as you can after the procedure. Walking around as soon as you are able will also help.
- During the procedure the spinal nerves can be injured. This is very rare and can be temporary or permanent. It can cause numbness or weakness in the legs. Even more rare is a loss of bladder or bowel control. These symptoms do not always improve with time.
- There is a small risk of a further narrowing at some point in the future. This is usually arthritis at a different level to the operation or scar at the same level.

- It is reported that some patients feel their back pain is more troublesome after a lumbar decompression procedure. This often takes the form of grumbling, nuisance backache and is not usually disabling.
- There is a small risk of injury to the protective coating (dura) around the nerves. This may need repair during the procedure. It can cause a headache for a few days. It should not cause any long-term problems but may slow down your initial recovery. Very rarely ongoing leakage of the fluid around the nerves can occur. If this happens, it may require further surgery.

The risks of a general anaesthetic include:

- Common temporary side effects including bruising or pain in the area of injections, blurred vision and sickness, these can often be treated and pass off quickly.
- Infrequent (less than 1%) complications including temporary breathing difficulties, muscle pains, headaches, damage to teeth, lip or tongue, sore throat and temporary problems with speaking.
- Extremely rare and serious complications (less than 1 in 10,000) including severe allergic reactions and death, brain damage, kidney and liver failure, lung damage, permanent nerve or blood vessel damage, eye injury, and damage to the voice box. If you are concerned about any of these risks, or have any further questions, please speak to Mr Bateman or your anaesthetic consultant.

Alternatives

Mr Bateman has recommended this procedure as being the best option for you at the moment.

The alternatives to this procedure include continuing with pain-relieving medication, physiotherapy or spinal injections. There is also the option of not receiving any treatment at all.

If you would like more information, please speak to Mr Bateman or one of the nurses caring for you.

What happens after the procedure?

You will be encouraged to walk as soon as possible after surgery. This will usually be the day of surgery unless your operation is very late in the day.

Your back will be painful for the first few days after surgery but you will be given pain relievers to make this manageable. You should aim to move around frequently as this will minimise painful back spasm.

You will normally be allowed to go home from hospital the day after surgery. I will see you in clinic around 6 weeks after the procedure.

The time taken to return to work varies. If you work from a home office, you will probably be working within a few days. Light manual workers usually return to work at around 4 weeks. Patients who do heavy physical work may not return to work for around 6 - 8 weeks after surgery.

Once the wound has healed you can return to gentle activities such as swimming and cycling. This is usually around 2 - 6 weeks after surgery. I recommend avoiding heavy lifting for at least 6 weeks after the procedure.

If you are planning to return to sport, you may benefit from a course of physiotherapy to help strengthen the spine before returning to such activity.

You can resume normal sexual activity after surgery as soon as your symptoms allow. This is usually around 2 - 6 weeks after surgery.

You can return to driving as soon as you are able to control your vehicle and perform an emergency stop, if necessary. This is usually around 2 - 6 weeks after your procedure. Please be aware that long periods sitting in a car can cause back muscle spasm and pain.

Will it work?

The main aim of lumbar decompression surgery is relief of your leg pain and heaviness. The success rate varies. It will usually improve your ability to walk for longer. Around 70 - 80% of patients who have a lumbar decompression are satisfied with the amount of symptom relief they achieve. Please remember that lumbar decompression is not an operation for the relief of back pain although back symptoms do sometimes improve.