

Taking Care of Yourself After Your

Lumbar Laminectomy or Microdiscectomy

First Month

Less leg pain

Over the first month after surgery, you will begin to feel less leg pain. For some people, the numbness and weakness may last for several more weeks or months. This usually depends on how much the nerve was pinched before surgery. In many cases, tingling and “memory” pain can arise, particularly 7 to 10 days after the operation even if the surgery was effective in relieving the pain initially.

Pain from your incision will also fade. The muscles in your back were stretched and pulled during surgery. This can be painful but it gets less each week. You can stretch and relax them by making sure that you keep your back straight when you stand, sit, walk or lie down. On average, it takes about 3 to 4 months for bone healing to take place and may continue for at least a year.

What you can do

Protect your healing back by being careful what you do:

- Listen to your body. It will tell you if you need to change or adjust your position.
- Your doctor may want you to limit sitting to 30 minutes at a time. Ask your surgeon.
- Don't lift or carry more than 5 to 10 pounds – about a gallon of milk. Keep what you are carrying close to your body to prevent stress on your spine.
- Don't bend over at the waist. Squat and lift with the knees, and bend at the hips. When you occasionally bend over a sink, bend at your hips and knees.
- You can walk or stand through the day, but make sure you sit or lie down to rest every hour.
- There are no limitations on reclining.
- Don't go jogging or running.
- Don't twist your back.

Driving is permitted after 2 weeks, if you are no longer on pain medications. Keep your knees even with your hips or a little lower to support your lower back. You can ride in a car as a passenger, as long as you stop every 45 to 60 minutes to stretch.

Call your doctor if

- You have new weakness, numbness or tingling down your arms or legs.
- Your pain becomes severe. It may be possible to relieve swelling with medications.

Second and Third Months

What you can do

With your doctor's permission, you can return to your previous activities as you feel you are able.

The best way to prevent future back problems is to reduce stress on your spine by:

- Maintaining a healthy weight.
- Paying attention to how you are lifting, sitting and standing.
- Keeping your abdominal muscles in shape.
- Choosing sensible activities.

Talk with your regular physician about a safe diet and exercise plan.

Returning to work

Most patients do not return to work for at least 3 weeks after surgery.

Some people are able to carefully change their work environment and can go back sooner. However, most patients are better off returning to light duty only after a full 4 weeks of convalescence. The limitations for activities detailed above apply to both the workplace and home.