

## Laminectomy

- ◆ A laminectomy is a surgical procedure where the lamina (the back part of the vertebra) is removed to relieve nerve compression caused by prolapsed discs and spinal stenosis.
- ◆ Laminectomies are a major surgery and as with all surgeries it carries the potential risk of complications associated with the procedure.
- ◆ Laminectomies can help to reduce spinal compression and relieve the pain caused by this.

### What is a laminectomy?

A laminectomy is a surgical procedure where the back part of the vertebra known as the lamina is removed. This is done to relieve pressure on the spinal cord or the nerves emerging from it (nerve compression) or to allow access to the spinal cord so it can be operated on (for example if it has a tumour on it). Laminectomies are commonly used for cases of prolapsed (slipped) discs and/or other conditions that cause spinal stenosis (narrowing of the spinal canal).

### Before a laminectomy

Laminectomies are performed when a problem is causing rapid paralysis of limbs or to treat slow deterioration in limbs or pain. Before the procedure diagnostic tests are usually run. X-rays are used to see if there are any bone abnormalities and a myelogram may be performed. This involves the injection of dye into the space around the spinal cord in order to visualise if anything is pressing on it. CT and MRI scans may also be used.

### During a laminectomy

The procedure is performed under general anaesthetic and would require you to be admitted to hospital the night before. You will not be allowed to eat for at least six hours before the operation. During the surgery you will lie down on the operating table face down and a small incision will be made in your back. The lamina bone will then be cut away using a variety of bone cutting equipment. The amount of bone removed depends on the problem the laminectomy is being used to treat. In some instances a lot of bone has to be removed and this may cause weakening of the spine. In these cases metal rods or bone grafts may be used to stabilise these weakened areas. After the procedure is completed the incision site will be closed and you will be taken to your room to recover.

### After the procedure

A laminectomy is a serious surgery and recovery from it may take some time. When in recovery medical staff will monitor you checking your general observations such as blood pressure regularly for the first few hours. There may be soreness for which you will be given painkillers. You will be allowed to eat and drink the next day and your drip will be removed. A catheter may be fitted to help you pass urine until you are on your feet again. The surgeon will assess you to decide when you are well enough to get on your feet again. This decision depends on the type of operation. Most surgeons like to get people up and mobile as soon as possible. Once up and about you will likely see a physiotherapist to help you stop your back from stiffening. Most patients go home within two weeks of surgery and have their stitches removed after 10 days. With some patients a spinal corset/support may be used. It may be wise to avoid driving until it is comfortable to do so as well as other activities.

### Complications associated with laminectomies

There is always the possibility of complications arising during and/or after any surgery including a laminectomy. Some of the more common less serious issues surround pain at the surgical incision site which can be treated with analgesics (painkillers). Infection of the incision site and incision site drainage. You may also experience difficulty passing urine and may need to have a catheter fitted to help this.

Other complications such as loss of bowel control may also occur and there is also the risk of blood clots forming, infection, excessive bleeding and worsening of back pain. Patients may also experience nerve damage or spinal fluid leakage. Fever may also occur and increasing numbness in the limbs and buttocks. Severe headaches, swelling, sutures/staples coming out and blood soaked bandages. These complications should they arise can be treated. Remember to inform medical staff if you start to feel unwell in anyway.

For more information on laminectomies and other surgical procedure speak to your doctor