

Lumbar Discectomy

University Neurosurgery Information Sheet

General Indications for the Procedure:

Disk herniations may pinch nerves and cause significant pain, weakness and/or numbness. A lumbar discectomy is a procedure used to remove a herniated disk in the lower back. Removal of the offending disk material alleviates these symptoms.

Description of the Procedure:

A lumbar discectomy is performed by making a small incision in the lower back. The muscles are carefully moved and the area of the disk rupture is exposed. The proper level is identified with an intraoperative x-ray. The operating microscope is used to improve illumination and provide magnification. A small amount of bone is removed to expose the nerve root and disk herniation. The disk herniation is carefully removed. The bleeding is controlled and the wound is repaired with sutures.

Risks of the Procedure:

The risks and possible complications of this procedure are quite rare. They include, but are not limited to infection, bleeding, and injury to the nerve root(s) which could result in permanent paralysis and/or numbness in the leg. There is a slight chance that spinal fluid may leak from the tissue surrounding the spinal cord. If this occurs, the leak can usually be successfully stopped with stitches. Infrequently, such leakage may require additional surgery to control. In exceedingly rare cases there may be injury to one of the large vessels in the abdomen which could result in significant and even life threatening bleeding. There is no guarantee that this operation will alleviate the symptoms.

Procedure Alternatives, if any:

Continued nonoperative therapy.

Probable Consequences of Refusing the Procedure:

Symptoms will persist and/or worsen.

Person(s) Performing the Procedure:

The surgical team for this procedure is large. This involves, but is not limited to, the attending surgeons, resident surgeons, surgical nurses, physician assistants, surgical technologists and anesthesiologists. Everyone involved will be performing important tasks related to the surgery in accordance with the hospital policies, and based on their skill set and under the supervision of the responsible practitioners.