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What to Expect with a Lumbar Decompression and/or Discectomy

Surgery

- Incision will be vertical and approximately 1 - 6 inches long.
- Surgery can take 1 – 3 hours, depending on the extent of surgery.

Length of Stay

- Most patients go home the same day as surgery or the next day.

Pain

- In addition to the incisional pain in the back, you may experience referred pain in the buttocks, hips, and thighs.
- You may experience “reminder pain” after your surgery. This is pain that is similar to your preoperative pain but is intermittent. This pain is due to postoperative swelling and irritation of the nerves, and will resolve gradually.
- You will be prescribed narcotic pain medications after surgery. To avoid side effects such as excessive sedation and constipation, take the pain medication only when you are having pain, and stop taking them as soon as you can.
- If you are able to tolerate them in the past, over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications such as Motrin (ibuprofen) or Aleve (naproxen) can provide good pain relief. Remember to take these medications with food.
- You may drive after you have stopped taking narcotic pain medications.

Mobility

- The nursing and/or physical therapy staff will assist you with getting out of bed the first time after surgery.
- At home, we encourage walking multiple times a day as tolerated. Walking will help to prevent potentially life-threatening blood clots in the legs.
- Most patients are able to begin to perform activities of daily living the day after surgery.
- You should not lift anything over 10 pounds until cleared by your surgeon.
- Most patients begin postoperative physical therapy at 2 - 6 weeks after surgery.

Work and Sports

- Most patients return to deskwork at 1 - 2 weeks after surgery.
- Most patients return to heavier work and sports at 2 - 3 months after surgery.

Nutrition

- If you find that you do not have an appetite after surgery, try drinking nutritional supplements like Boost or Ensure.

Medications that Affect the Surgery

- You must stop taking anti-inflammatory medications (e.g. ibuprofen, Motrin, Advil, Naprosyn, Aleve, etc.), aspirin and other blood thinners (e.g. warfarin, Coumadin, Aggrenox, Plavix, etc.) for 5-10 days (depending on the specific drug) prior to surgery.
- You must avoid nicotine exposure for at least 2 weeks before and 6 weeks after your surgery. This includes second-hand smoke.

For more information, visit the patient education website of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons at <http://orthoinfo.aaos.org>