

Laminectomy Q & A

What is a laminectomy?

A laminectomy, sometimes called decompression surgery, is a procedure that creates space in your spinal canal by removing the lamina. The lamina is the back part of a vertebra that covers and protects your spinal canal.

The operation reduces spinal stenosis, which is the narrowing of your spinal column that leads to nerve compression, pain, numbness, and weakness.

Why would I need a laminectomy?

Spinal stenosis is a condition in which your spinal canal narrows. It can occur anywhere in your back but is most often found in your neck (cervical) or lower (lumbar) spine. The narrowing could be caused by a variety of injuries and conditions, including:

- Osteoarthritis
- Bone overgrowth
- Herniated discs
- Thickened ligaments
- Fractures
- Dislocations
- Tumors

If your spinal cord or any of the peripheral nerves that extend from your spinal cord through the rest of your body are irritated or compressed, you develop symptoms including pain, numbness, and tingling. Depending on the location of your stenosis, it can also increase your risk of falling or interfere with your ability to pick up and grasp objects.

What happens during a laminectomy?

Our team at Ascension Michigan Orthopaedics-Rochester provides both minimally invasive and traditional open laminectomy surgeries. We provide general anesthesia so you sleep comfortably throughout the procedure.

Our team begins by making the necessary incision(s) on your back to reach the affected vertebrae. Then, we carefully trim away part of your lamina. If your stenosis is due to a herniated disc or slipped vertebra, we may remove the damaged parts of the disc or vertebra. If necessary, the doctor uses metal pins to secure your vertebra before closing your incision.

What should I expect while recovering from a laminectomy?

In most cases, a friend or family member can drive you home once you recover from your anesthesia. While you will have some discomfort from the surgery, you should notice that the symptoms caused by your spinal stenosis improve rapidly. Most patients start to return to light

activity within a few days and regular activities in a few weeks. Your surgeon gives you personalized aftercare instructions and schedules physical therapy to support your recovery.