

This document will give you information about a cervical laminectomy. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What is cervical spinal stenosis?

Cervical spinal stenosis is where the spinal canal narrows in your neck (see figure 1). A narrowed spinal canal in your neck can press on your spinal cord, preventing it from working properly. The condition can also trap the nerves. This may cause weakness or numbness in your arms and legs.

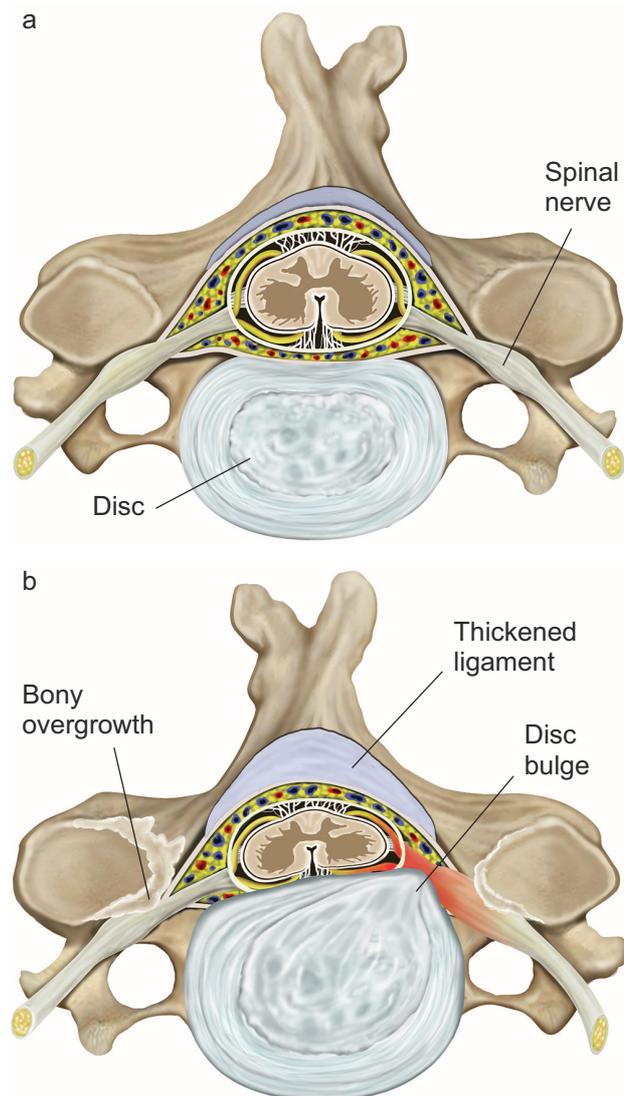


Figure 1

a A normal spinal canal and disc

b A disc bulge pressing on a spinal nerve

What are the benefits of surgery?

The aim is to prevent further damage to your spinal cord. Surgery cannot repair damage to your spinal cord but your symptoms may improve.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

If your symptoms are mild, you may not need any treatment. If your symptoms are severe or are getting worse, surgery is usually the only option.

What does the operation involve?

Various anaesthetic techniques are possible. The operation usually takes one to two hours. Your surgeon will make a cut on the centre of the back of your neck. They will part the muscles to get to your spine. Your surgeon will remove enough bone and ligament tissue to open up the narrowed part of the canal, giving the spinal cord and blood vessels more room.

What complications can happen?

1 General complications

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Unsightly scarring
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Difficulty passing urine
- Blood clots
- Chest infection
- Heart attack or stroke

2 Specific complications

- Neuropathic pain
- Injury to your spinal cord and nerves
- Infection in your spine
- Damage to the nerve roots
- Tear of the thin membrane that covers the nerves in your spine
- Spinal instability

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home after two to three days.

Do not lift anything heavy or twist your body. Make sure you keep a good posture when sitting and walking.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Most people make a good recovery from surgery.

Summary

Cervical spinal stenosis is where the spinal canal narrows in your neck, causing weakness or numbness in your arms and legs. The aim of surgery is to prevent further damage to your spinal cord. Your symptoms may improve.

Acknowledgements

Author: Mr Richard Ashpole FRCS (Neuro. Surg.)
Illustrations: Copyright ©  Neurodesign. All rights reserved. www.neurosurgeon.co.uk and Medical Illustration Copyright © Medical-Artist.com

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.