

Information for Patients

A discectomy is surgery (an operation) to remove some disc material in the spine. It should only be performed for a few clinical reasons. It is sometimes performed to treat a herniated disc (a 'slipped disc'). But medical evidence tells us that the operation can sometimes do more harm than good. Many people's symptoms will improve without surgery.

About the condition

A herniated disc is when the disc material that sits between the bones of your back bulges out. This usually happens as part of the natural process of the discs ageing. It can cause pressure on the nerves coming from the spine. This can cause symptoms such as pain, tingling, pins and needles, numbness, and mild weakness. These symptoms often improve over time. More serious symptoms are severe weakness and changes in the way the bowel and bladder work, which would need urgent medical attention.

What are the **BENEFITS** of the surgery?

If scans show there is a slipped disc and alternative treatments have not improved the symptoms over time, a discectomy may help improve the symptoms.

What are the **RISKS**?

A discectomy may not improve your symptoms and may make your back pain worse. Also, any surgery involves risks, including infection, bleeding, and how anaesthetics may affect you.

What are the **ALTERNATIVES**?

Continuing with day-to-day activities as much as possible can benefit many people. For some, losing weight, physical exercise, physiotherapy and pain killers may also help. You can discuss alternatives, and what is best for you, with your doctor.

What if you do **NOTHING**?

Most back pain often settles by itself. However, for many people, periods of back pain may come and go throughout their life.

For more information see [Slipped disc - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

You can find out more about the [Evidence Based Interventions](#) programme online