



Spire Healthcare

Treatment summary

Back surgery

About the back

The spine (or backbone) is made up of bones called vertebrae, which are linked together. Cushions of tissue, called discs, sit between the vertebrae and act as shock absorbers. The vertebrae also meet at joints called facet joints.

The spinal cord runs through a channel in the spine. Nerves supplying the body branch off the spinal cord through spaces between the vertebrae. Spinal surgery is usually performed to relieve pressure on one or more nerves.

What puts pressure on the nerves?

Several things can lead to nerve compression. Discs can bulge out from between two vertebrae. This is known as a slipped or prolapsed disc. Depending on the position of the slipped disc, it can

cause back pain and sciatica (pain, usually in the back of the legs) or difficulty controlling the bladder and bowels.

What is back surgery?

There are various different operations to relieve nerve compression. The exact operation that you will have depends on the cause of the pain. Back operations are performed under general anaesthesia, which means you will be asleep throughout the procedure and will feel no pain.

Some of the most common procedures are described below. Sometimes, more than one procedure is done during a single operation. Your surgeon will explain which is most suitable for you and the benefits and risks of having a back operation, together with any alternatives.

- Discectomy – the soft centre of the disc that is protruding and putting pressure on the spinal cord or nerve is removed.
- Nerve root or spinal decompression – any bone, disc tissue or other material putting pressure on the nerve root or spinal cord is removed.
- Spinal fusion – vertebrae are joined together, using bone taken from your hip, metal implants or a specially designed cage.

A physiotherapist will visit you after your operation and discuss exercises you can do in bed to help speed up your recovery. Before you go home, your physiotherapist will make sure you can use stairs and sit comfortably for about 10 minutes.

Depending on the operation you have, you will usually need to stay in hospital for two to seven days.

Back surgery is commonly performed and generally safe. For most people, the benefits are greater than the disadvantages. However, all operations carry risks as well as benefits.

The possible complications of any operation include an unexpected reaction to the anaesthetic, infection, excessive bleeding or developing a blood clot, usually in a vein in the leg (deep vein thrombosis – DVT).

Spinal surgery can, in rare cases, cause damage to the spinal cord or surrounding nerves. This can lead to numbness, loss of muscle control, pain or paralysis.

The chance of complications depends on the exact type of operation you are having and other factors such as your general health. Ask your surgeon to explain in more detail how any risks apply to you.

To find out more about having back surgery in a Spire Healthcare hospital, please contact your local Spire hospital.



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