

The most common back surgeries, explained

June 21 2023, by Ann Schreiber



Imagine a life where even the simplest movement becomes a painful endeavor.

Back pain, a pervasive ailment affecting millions, can turn daily routines into exhausting and painful challenges. Back [surgery](#) emerges as a potential solution when conventional treatments fall short, offering hope for those trapped in [chronic pain](#).

What are the most common back surgery types, and how do they bring relief? This article will explore the purpose of these surgeries, their benefits, the conditions they can help address and recovery times.

Most common back surgery types

According to StatPearls, [23% of adults worldwide endure chronic low back pain](#). While the majority of back pain resolves naturally within three months, there are instances where back surgery can provide relief for specific types of back pain. However, according to the Mayo Clinic, [back surgery is rarely necessary](#) and should be considered only when other treatment options have been exhausted and the pain becomes debilitating.

However, a handful of different approaches can be taken for back surgery, depending on your level of pain and the severity of symptoms.

Here are the four types of back surgeries:

Discectomy

According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), a discectomy is a surgical procedure that removes the damaged portion of a herniated spinal disk. It offers relief by alleviating pressure on irritated or compressed nerves. Typically, it is most effective in treating pain that radiates down the arms or legs due to nerve compression. However, if the pain is localized solely in the back or neck, discectomy may be less beneficial than [alternative treatments](#) like

weight loss, arthritis medication or [physical therapy](#).

When nonsurgical interventions are ineffective or symptoms worsen, a health care provider may recommend a diskectomy. This procedure can be performed as a minimally invasive diskectomy, which many surgeons prefer. Utilizing small incisions, a microscope, or a tiny video camera for visualization, minimally invasive diskectomy offers a less invasive option for patients.

You could go home the day of surgery, but a short hospital stay might be needed, especially for those who have other serious medical conditions, the Mayo Clinic says. You may be able to return to work in 2 to 6 weeks, but full recovery could take 6 to 8 weeks if you have a job that includes heavy lifting or operating heavy machinery.

Laminectomy

Johns Hopkins Medicine says that a laminectomy is a [surgical procedure](#) that [relieves pressure on spinal nerves by removing a portion of the lamina](#), the bony arch covering the spinal canal. It is commonly performed for spinal stenosis, which narrows the spinal canal and compresses nerves, causing pain, numbness or weakness. Recovery time after a laminectomy varies, but it typically involves a hospital stay of a few days and several weeks to months for a full recovery.

Physical therapy may aid in restoring strength and mobility. While laminectomy carries potential risks—such as infection or nerve damage—patients should discuss benefits, risks and recovery expectations with their [health care provider](#) before deciding on surgery.

Spinal fusion surgery

Back fusion surgery is performed to join two or more vertebrae in the spine, eliminating motion between them. This surgical intervention addresses spinal instability, fractures or chronic back pain caused by degenerative disk disease.

According to the [American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons](#), back fusion surgery involves placing bone grafts or artificial materials between the affected vertebrae, which eventually fuse together over time.

[Dr. James Bruffey](#), an [orthopaedic surgeon](#) with Scripps Health in San Diego, explains a non-fusion procedure for a spinal fusion patient in this Scripps [video](#). "A surgery done from the front of the spine gives us access to the disk spaces... because that's where we can achieve the best effect as far as getting our fusions to heal and getting the spine realigned in its more anatomic position."

The [recovery time](#) following spinal fusion surgery can vary. Generally, patients may need to stay in the hospital for a few days after the procedure. During the initial recovery period, which can last several weeks, patients may need to wear a brace to support the spine and aid in healing. It is important to note that full recovery from spinal fusion surgery can take several months, and physical therapy may be recommended to improve strength, flexibility and overall spinal function.

Artificial lumbar disk surgery

Artificial lumbar disk surgery, also known as lumbar disk replacement, is a procedure to treat degenerative disk disease in the lower back. According to the [American Association of Neurological Surgeons](#), this lower back surgery involves removing and replacing the damaged disk with an artificial disk implant, to restore normal disk height and

function. This procedure aims to alleviate pain and preserve motion in the lumbar spine.

This procedure is an alternative to traditional [spinal fusion surgery](#), allowing for preserved movement and flexibility in the treated area. Recovery time following artificial lumbar disk surgery can vary, depending on individual healing and rehabilitation. Patients typically undergo physical therapy to regain strength, stability and flexibility in the lower back.

Back surgery can provide relief in extreme cases

If you are experiencing back pain, it is generally recommended that you exhaust nonsurgical or more conservative treatment options before considering back surgery.

[Dr. Ray Oshtory](#), an orthopaedic spine surgeon at California Pacific Medical Center, said in a recent [article](#) that, "Surgical methods have advanced tremendously in their ability to solve some back problems in a minimally invasive way. However, studies show that when it comes to back [pain](#) alone, without other symptoms, surgery doesn't work any better than rehabilitation."

Remember, the decision to undergo back surgery should always be made in close consultation with your doctor, ensuring that the chosen path is the most suitable for your specific circumstances.

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