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What is a Microdiscectomy?

Microdiscectomy is a spinal surgical procedure performed to remove the part of the disc that impinges on the spinal nerve(s). The desired outcome of this surgery is to relieve symptoms such as leg and/or back pain, weakness, and numbness in your legs and feet. This procedure requires a small incision of 1 – 2 inches on the back and is performed using a microscope and microsurgical techniques.

Microdiscectomy is particularly effective in relieving leg pain associated with lumbar disc herniation (rupture, tear). Discs are the shock-absorbing cushions between the vertebrae (back bones) of your spinal column and may herniate due to several reasons, including trauma, stress and strain, and aging.

A microdiscectomy may be performed in different regions of the spine, cervical (neck), thoracic (mid back), and lumbar (low back).

Pre-Register for Surgery Online or by Phone

Pre-registration is a **two-step** process that is necessary for you to complete before having surgery at California Pacific Medical Center. Step one (1) involves registration of your insurance and personal information. Step two (2) involves speaking with a registered nurse (RN), who informs you of any necessary testing you may need before your surgery.

1. **Pre-register online at www.cpmc.org/services/pre-reg.html**. Click “Register online” for the campus where your surgery is scheduled. Follow the online instructions to complete the Surgery Pre-Admission form. This will take about 10 to 15 minutes. Be sure to have your insurance information when you complete the online form. You may also call (415) 600-2500 to speak with a registrar.
2. **Speak with a nurse by calling (415) 600-2500** no earlier than 2 weeks before your surgery. You may speak with a nurse at that time or schedule a phone appointment for a later time. Please have a current list of medications and supplements you are taking. The nurse informs you of any further testing you may need.

What Can I Expect at California Pacific Medical Center?

Before Surgery

- **You may not eat or drink anything after midnight, the night before surgery, unless otherwise directed by your doctor. Note:** However, you may continue to take your routine medications (for example, heart and blood pressure medications), on the morning of surgery with a sip of water.
- **Consult with your surgeon if you are taking blood-thinning medications, NSAIDs, or Insulin.** Examples include Coumadin (Warfarin), Plavix (Clopidogrel), and Aspirin; Nonsteroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) such as Motrin (Ibuprofen), Aleve (Naproxen), Feldene (Piroxicam); or Insulin.

After Surgery

- Generally, you may expect to go home from the hospital the day of surgery or the day after your surgery.
- You will be walking on the day of surgery and learning how to turn in bed using a *logrolling* technique. The *logrolling* technique involves moving your whole body as a unit from side to side without twisting the spine.
- Minor discomfort from the incision is common and can be relieved by pain medication such as light oral narcotics – Norco or Vicodin (Hydrocodone and Acetaminophen) or Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) such as Motrin (Ibuprofen).

Note: Do not drive a car if you are taking narcotics or muscle relaxants. These medications affect your judgment and reaction time.

- Some patients experience mild episodes of muscle spasms in their back and legs (after low back surgery) or in their neck and arms (after neck surgery). Ice/heat packs or muscle relaxants can be used to lessen the discomfort.
- You may continue to experience pain, numbness, and weakness along the path of the nerve that was decompressed by surgery. These symptoms will gradually decrease over time.
- Speak with your surgeon's office about the timing of your first post-operative office visit.

Preparing to Go Home

How to Care for Your Incision and Dressing

- Keep your dressing dry and clean for 7 days after surgery to prevent infection.
- You may shower if you cover the incision with plastic wrap to keep it dry.
- Steri-strips® (incision tapes) may have fallen off or be removed 7 – 10 days after surgery.
- **Incision and dressing care may vary from patient to patient. Please make sure you understand your surgeon's instructions before you leave the hospital.**

Know Your Proper Body Mechanics and Activity Restrictions

- **No bending or twisting of your back.** Keep your back straight and bend your knees using your thigh muscles.
- **No sitting in soft chairs or sofas that allow your back to curve.** Sitting may be uncomfortable, so limit your time sitting in a chair. Sit and stand straight.
- **No jogging.** Short, frequent short walks are better than long walks.
- **No lifting more than 5 (five) pounds, no housework, no yard work during the 1st month or until allowed by your doctor.**

Follow the Guidelines for Physical Activity After Surgery

- Light activities such as walking may be started on the day of surgery. Your physical activities should progress gradually by alternating activity with rest.
 - Plan for short walks with rest periods.
 - Each day increase your walking distance on a gradual basis.
- Exercises should be started when you have been instructed by your surgeon.
- Sexual activity is permitted within the bounds of your comfort. Consult with your surgeon.
- Discuss returning to work during your doctor's appointment. Generally, light duty may be resumed in 10 days to 2 weeks.
- Avoid driving until consulting with your surgeon at the first post-operative visit.

When to Call Your Doctor

Call Your Doctor if You Experience Any of the Following Symptoms

- If you feel warm or chilled, take your temperature. Call your doctor with a temperature of 101 °F or 38.3 °C or above.
- Increasing redness and swelling at the incision site.
- Changes in the amount, appearance, or odor of drainage from your incision.
- New or increased changes in sensation/presence of numbness in extremities.
- Severe pain that is not relieved by medication and rest.
- Questions or problems not covered by these instructions.

More Ways to Learn

- Go to www.cpmc.org/learning.
- Go to the MedlinePlus Web site at www.medlineplus.gov, click on "Health Topics", then the letter "B" and then "Back Injuries."

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: What is a Microdiscectomy?

Answer: Microdiscectomy is a spinal surgical procedure performed to remove the part of the disc that impinges on the spinal nerve(s).

Question: How do I care for my incision after surgery?

Answer: For detailed instructions on caring for your incision, please refer to page 4 of this handout.

Question: What are the guidelines for physical activity following surgery?

Answer: Do not jeopardize your recovery by being over-active too soon. Please refer to page 4 of this handout for detailed guidelines on your physical activity following surgery.

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Note: This information is not meant to replace any information or personal medical advice which you get directly from your doctor(s). If you have any questions about this information, such as the risks or benefits of the treatment listed, please ask your doctor(s).