

Health Tips

from New London Hospital

Spinal Stenosis

Lumbar spinal stenosis (LSS) is narrowing of the spinal canal that usually starts gradually and develops over a long period of time. As the spinal canal narrows, it can squeeze and irritate the nerve roots that branch out from the spinal cord, or it can squeeze and irritate the spinal cord itself. This results in pain, numbness and weakness in the legs. LSS is usually treated with medications, exercise, weight loss and physical therapy.



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Surgery may be recommended for patients who have tried nonsurgical treatment for a period of time but their symptoms have not improved. The most common type of surgery for LSS is decompressive laminectomy which relieves pressure on the spinal cord or the spinal nerve roots. Laminectomy removes part of the vertebra (bone and/or fibrous tissue) to create space for nerves.

Interspinous Process Decompression (IPD) is the first alternative to conventional LSS surgery and is proven to significantly improve symptom severity and physical function. The ideal candidate for this procedure is someone age 50 and older whose function is moderately impaired and who may experience some pain relief by bending forward.

The procedure can be performed as outpatient surgery in many cases, does not require general anesthesia and is completely reversible, an important consideration for patients who may need to undergo further surgical procedures.

Patients often go home the same day and postoperative medication is usually not necessary. The effects of surgery are usually immediate and most patients report being pain free after surgery. Patients are often back to near normal activities with minimal physical limitations. Those who feel they might benefit from further information on lumbar spinal stenosis are urged to speak with their primary care provider.

Joseph M. Phillips, MD, a surgeon with Upper Valley Neurology Neurosurgery performs IPD at New London Hospital.

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