



Over-the-Top Decompression: Microscopic Unilateral Surgery for Lumbar Spinal Stenosis

One-page summary of the full Spinemathema guide. Scan the QR code for the full guide, with references and audio.

Key points

- An over-the-top decompression treats narrowing of the spinal canal in the lower back (lumbar spinal stenosis). Working from one side under an operating microscope, the surgeon reaches across to free the nerves on both sides.
- It keeps the spinous process (the bony ridge down the middle of your back), the ligaments joining these bones and the muscles on the other side.
- In trials, disability and leg pain improved about as much as after a traditional laminectomy, and results held up at five years.
- It is mainly an operation for leg pain and walking. Back pain is helped less reliably.
- Serious complications are uncommon, but every operation has risks, set out with figures below.

After your operation, call 999 or go to A&E if you have:

- Numbness or loss of feeling around your genitals or your bottom (anus).
- New difficulty peeing, or not being able to control when you pee or poo.
- New pain, tingling, weakness or numbness in both legs.
- A painful, swollen leg with shortness of breath or chest pain.

The first three can mean the nerves at the base of the spine are being squeezed, for example by bleeding after surgery, and need treatment as soon as possible. Do not drive yourself: ask someone to take you, or call 999. See also our warning signs page.

Not sure how urgent it is? Call NHS 111. More warning signs: spinemathema.com/warning-signs

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General information only, not personal medical advice.

If you are worried about your symptoms, contact your GP,

NHS 111, or in an emergency call 999.

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