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LUMBAR MICRODISCECTOMY

A lumbar microdiscectomy is a commonly performed procedure for a lumbar disc prolapse (herniation) which can cause leg pain (sciatica), numbness tingling and/or weakness. The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and lasts about one hour. A 4 cm skin incision is made in the lower back, and using a powerful microscope, a 15 mm window is made in the bone and ligamentous covering of the spine to access the area containing the nerves and the disc prolapse. The prolapsed disc fragment is then carefully removed to release the nerve.

WHAT IS THE SUCCESS RATE?

The success rate is approximately 80 to 90%. Most patients experience complete relief of sciatica within a few days after surgery. In others, the pain may take longer to settle due to nerve swelling caused by the disc prolapse. About 5 to 8% of patients with a successful result from the operation will develop another disc prolapse at some stage in the future.

WHAT IS THE RECOVERY TIME?

Patients are usually able to get out of bed for a short walk within four to six hours of the operation. Most patients are ready to go home within 12 to 24 hours of the operation. Patients are usually able to drive a car within seven to ten days and return to normal non-strenuous activities within two to three weeks. Patients with desk-based or non-physical jobs may return to work at two to three weeks, but a longer period off work is usually advised if the occupation involves heavy physical work.