Cotton O'Neil Neurosurgery and Spine Center — Stormont Vail Health

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Preparing for Your Lumbar Laminectomy

VERSION V1.0

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Decompression for lumbar stenosis. What is different about getting ready for this particular operation.

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Start with the general guide

Our **Preparing for Your Spine Surgery** handout covers everything that is the same no matter which operation you are having: stopping nicotine, getting your medical conditions optimized, the medication review and the coordinated preoperative visit, setting up help at home, the Hibiclens showers, and the morning-of routine.

Read that one first. This page only covers what is specific to a lumbar laminectomy.

If anything here conflicts with what Dr. Tuchek, the pre-anesthesia team, or your other physicians tell you, **follow their specific instructions.** Those are tailored to you; this is a general roadmap.

What makes this operation different

A laminectomy removes the lamina — the back wall of the spinal canal — at one or more lumbar levels, giving the crowded nerves back the room they have lost. Bone spurs, thickened ligaments, and overgrown facet joints are trimmed as needed. **The disc is generally left alone, and we do not fuse.**

For stable stenosis without slippage or instability, decompression alone is enough and avoids the recovery and trade-offs of a fusion. We don't fuse what doesn't need fusing. The operation is done **from the back**, through a single small posterior midline incision.

Know what to expect from the result before you go in

Two things are true at the same time, and it helps to have both of them in your head on the morning of surgery:

Leg pain — particularly with walking longer distances — should improve somewhat quickly.

Back pain will take time to settle down as you heal from surgery.

Patients who go in expecting both at once are rarely surprised afterward.

Ask how many levels are planned

- **Surgery typically takes 60 to 90 minutes per level.** Tell whoever is waiting.
- **Most patients go home the same day or stay one night.**
- **Plan to arrive about two hours before your scheduled time**, unless the hospital pre-op call gives you a different time.

Plan a ride home for same-day discharge, and pack a small overnight bag anyway — it costs nothing to bring it home unused. **If you go home the same day, arrange for a responsible adult to stay with you overnight.**

Walking is the plan, starting the day of surgery

Walking the day of surgery is encouraged and expected. That is not a stretch goal; it is the plan.

The general guide asks you to walk 20 to 30 minutes most days in the weeks beforehand, and notes that **pool walking or swimming** is the alternative when back pain limits walking. If stenosis has already cut down how far you can walk, the pool version is the one that applies to you. Sort out where you will do that now.

What to arrange for afterward

- **Return to desk work in two to three weeks.** Ask for that time off now.
- **Driving when you are off narcotics.** Line up rides for the first stretch, including your ride home and your follow-up visits.
- **Heavy lifting and bending are restricted for four to six weeks.** Set your home up for that window — the general guide's advice to move frequently used items to waist-to-chest height is the one that matters most here.

The skin check applies to your low back

The general guide asks you to check the skin over your surgical area at least two weeks out. For a laminectomy that means **your lower back**. Tell us about any rash, open sore, or active infection

there with enough lead time that we can address it before your date.

Other handouts that matter most for this operation

Ask our office for these:

- **Preparing for Your Spine Surgery** — the general prep guide. Start here.
- **Anticoagulant and Antiplatelet Medications** — if you take aspirin, Plavix, Brilinta, Eliquis, Xarelto, Pradaxa, Savaysa, or Coumadin.
- **GLP-1 Medications and Surgery** — if you take Ozempic, Mounjaro, Wegovy, or Trulicity.
- **The Day of Your Surgery** — the morning-of routine and what happens at the hospital.
- **Spine Surgery Recovery** — what the days and weeks afterward look like.

When to call us

Before surgery, call our office at **(785) 368-0767** during clinic hours if you develop a fever, cough, or new illness; a new cut, rash, or skin infection on your back; or if you realize you took a medication you were told to hold.

For medical emergencies, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department. The clinic line is not an emergency line and is not staffed overnight.

The general guide's full "When to call us" list applies to this operation as well.

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This handout provides general guidance for patients of Chad Tuchek, MD at Cotton O'Neil Neurosurgery and Spine Center, Stormont Vail Health. It is not individualized medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions you receive from your surgeon and at discharge. **For medical emergencies, call 911.**