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

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Preparing for Your Microdiscectomy

VERSION V1.0

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A same-day operation on one lumbar nerve root. 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 microdiscectomy.

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 microdiscectomy removes the small fragment of disc material pressing on a single lumbar nerve root. **The disc itself stays in place — only the herniated piece is removed.** Nothing is fused and nothing is instrumented.

It is done through a **single small incision, typically about an inch**, using a tubular retractor or the operating microscope, under general anesthesia.

Surgery takes about an hour. You go home the same day.

Plan a same-day round trip

This is an outpatient operation, and the planning follows from that.

- **Plan to arrive about two hours before your scheduled time**, unless the hospital pre-op call gives you a different time.

- Tell whoever is waiting that the operation itself takes **about an hour**.
- **You go home the same day.** Have your ride arranged before you arrive — not arranged from the recovery room.
- **Arrange for a responsible adult to stay with you overnight** after same-day discharge following general anesthesia.
- **Most patients walk that afternoon.**
- **Return to driving when off narcotics — usually within a week.**
- **Return to desk work in one to two weeks.**

The restriction that protects the result

The single most important thing to understand before surgery day is what you are and are not allowed to do afterward, and why:

> Keep activity to light walking while avoiding bending, lifting, and twisting to minimize the chance of reherniation.
>
> These restrictions hold for the first 4–6 weeks while the disc heals.

That is the whole plan for the first 4–6 weeks: **light walking, no bending, no twisting, and nothing heavier than 5–10 pounds.** Also avoid prolonged sitting during the first few weeks — plan to get up and walk every 30 to 45 minutes.

The reason it matters:

> Re-herniation — the same disc herniating again — is uncommon, but it is the usual reason a patient needs a second operation.

Set your house up for it now. The general guide's step about moving frequently used items to waist-to-chest height is the one that matters most for this operation — because reaching low and reaching high are both off the list for six weeks. Do it before surgery, while you can still bend.

And because light walking is the prescribed activity rather than a suggestion, decide now where you will do it: a flat loop indoors, a hallway, a level sidewalk.

What to expect from the result

> Most patients see improvement in leg pain right away or within a few weeks.

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 microdiscectomy 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.**