



Cervical Disc Replacement
Kris Radcliff, MD

Spine Surgeon
Professor, Department of Orthopedic Surgery
Professor, Department of Neurological Surgery
Sidney Kimmel School of Medicine
Thomas Jefferson University
Spinal DISC Center
415 New Road, Suite 3
Somers Point, NJ 08244

Office/Forms (609) 800-3472
Fax (888) 977-5598
Text (609) 800-3472
Mobile (609) 800-3472
Email: doctor@spinaldisccenter.com



Introduction

I prepared this handout to help review and answer some common questions about spine surgery. Some aspects of this guide may not apply exactly to your case, and it is not intended to supersede our discussion. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

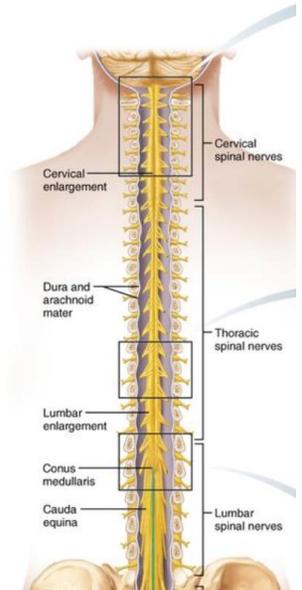
What is the Cervical Spine?

The spine is a part of the neck that contains the bones, discs, nerves, and spinal cord. The spine is within the center of the neck and holds up the head. Cervical disc replacement is performed to relieve nerve compression in the spine.

Stenosis means that there is not enough space for the nerves. In general, cervical spine surgery is performed to relieve stenosis. There are many causes of stenosis, including herniated discs, facet cysts, instability, bone spurs, osteophytes, or a slipped vertebrae.

What do the nerves look like?

See below. The spinal cord is in the center of the spinal canal. It is a thick, solid nerve about the thickness of a baby carrot. There are small branches that emerge from the central spinal cord and travel through the arms and legs. The small branches are called nerve roots. In the lumbar spine (low back), there is no spinal cord. There are only nerve roots.



What Are the Symptoms of Cervical Spine Problems?

Patients usually report neck, arm, or hand numbness, pain, or weakness

What is Radiculopathy?

Compression of the small nerves in the cervical spine causes arm pain, arm or hand numbness, headaches, or weakness in the arms and hands. Those arm and hand symptoms are called radiculopathy.

What is Myelopathy?

Compression of the large nerve, called the spinal cord, is called myelopathy. Myelopathy is a syndrome that causes a loss of finger coordination, balance problems, trouble with bladder function, and/or trouble with bowel function.

What Causes Neck Pain?

Occasionally, the bones can bump into each other because the discs fail to function as shock absorbers. In that case, the bony contact causes neck pain.

Why Do I Need Surgery?

I recommend surgery when the symptoms interfere with your quality of life and when no other reasonable alternatives are available.

When Is Surgery the Right Option for Me?

In most cases, surgery is the last option. I recommend waiting at least six to twelve weeks before having surgery in most cases. I recommend trying other treatments before surgery.

What Can I Do Other Than Surgery?

1. Do nothing/live with the condition
2. Physical therapy,
3. Chiropractic,
4. Acupuncture,

5. Anti-inflammation medications (Ibuprofen/Naproxen),
6. Pain medications (Acetaminophen/Aspirin),
7. Muscle Relaxers (Tizanidine, Flexeril)
8. Mild Opioid Medications (Tylenol #3, Tramadol),
9. Membrane Stabilizing Medications (Gabapentin, Neurontin, Lyrica, Pregabalin)
10. Strong Opioid Medications (Oxycodone or Hydrocodone),
11. Epidural Injections (which are a cortisone shot into the spinal canal also called a nerve block),
12. Facet Injections/Medial Branch Blocks (which are a cortisone shot into the small joints on the sides of the spine),
13. Nerve Ablation (burning or otherwise removing pain nerves in a small injection procedure)
14. Spinal Cord Stimulator (an electrical device to intercept pain signals before they reach your brain).

What is your practice focus? Do you perform other orthopedic surgeries?

I exclusively practice spinal surgery. I do not perform any other aspects of orthopedic surgery (such as hip replacement, shoulder surgery) so that I can stay focused on the latest techniques and literature in spine surgery.

Do You perform nonsurgical treatments such as injections?

No. I do not perform nonsurgical treatments such as injections, manipulation, chiropractic, acupuncture, physical therapy, or prescribe long term pain medications or cannabis. I can certainly give you some information and prescribe some nonsurgical treatments. However, I also have excellent specialists in my group who focus on non-surgical spine care to whom I can refer you for additional information about options to treat the spine other than surgery.

What is a pain management specialist?

A pain management specialist is a doctor who focuses on treatment of pain by means other than surgery. Several different medical specialties train on pain management, including psychiatry, anesthesiology, and psychiatry.

What do pain management specialists do?

Pain management specialists perform nonsurgical treatments such as injections in the spine. Pain management specialists prescribe and to some extent supervise physical therapy. Pain management specialists also can prescribe and supervise pain medication prescriptions called “medical management.”

What Are the Types of Surgery That Are Available to Treat This Condition?

There are three types of spine surgery:

- Decompression alone (to take the pressure off of the spinal nerves)
- Fusion which involves changing the mechanics of the spine.
- Disc Replacement to replace the joint with a ball-and-socket joint

Each surgery can be more or less invasive. In this case, I recommend a cervical artificial disc replacement.

What does Disc Replacement Mean?

Disc replacement means that I replace the cartilaginous disc with a joint that moves normally. There is no loss of motion.

What is the Goal of Surgery?

The goal of surgery is to take the pressure off of the spinal nerves. Removing the pressure from the nerves reduces arm pain, numbness, weakness, tingling. Surgery generally also stops future nerve damage from occurring at the level of surgery.

What is Going to Happen to Me?

I have a YouTube channel with microscope videos of an anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (<https://youtu.be/2d1oAfRMKKM>), a cervical disc replacement (<https://youtu.be/y0TtfKfcZNg>), a posterior cervical fusion (<https://youtu.be/1G8khOsGbs8>), and a cervical corpectomy (<https://youtu.be/W81cZwRnzLg>).

PROCEDURE

Will I have an incision?

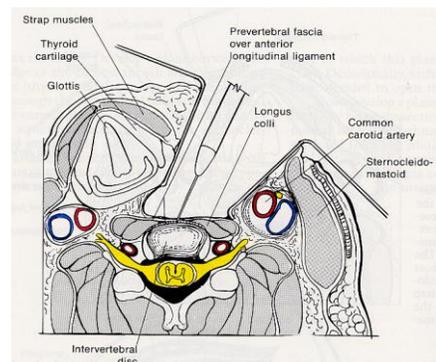
Yes. You will have a small incision on the front of your neck. The skin incision is 2-3 inches and usually horizontal. The incision is often incorporated into one of the folds in your neck so that when it's healed it won't be as noticeable.



What else do you have to move to get to the spine?

After the skin incision, I dissect to the spine. Dissecting means carefully finding and moving parts of the body. Along the way, I locate and move aside the windpipe ("trachea"), food tube ("esophagus"), and blood vessels ("the carotid sheath").

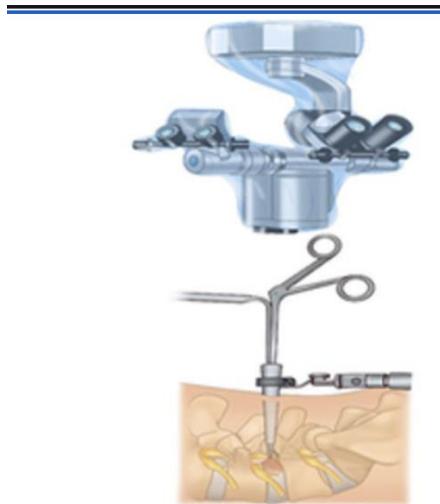
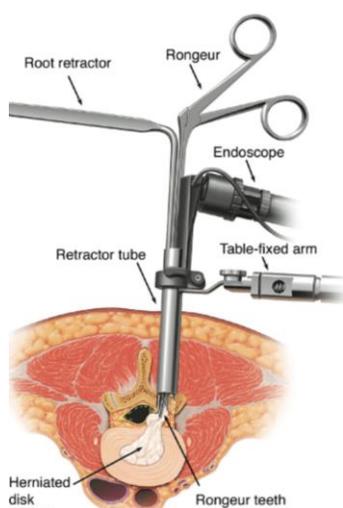
I have to move the nerves to the voice box ("recurrent laryngeal nerves



and superior laryngeal nerves") and the nerves that control swallowing in the back of the throat ("pharynx"), and the esophagus.

Do you Use A Camera or Is This Surgery Arthroscopic?

There are two different ways to do minimally invasive spine surgery. Some surgeons use an endoscope. I prefer to use a surgical microscope. The microscope improves view of the delicate spinal structures and therefore your safety. Both types of surgery are considered minimally invasive.



What can happen as a result of moving those structures aside?

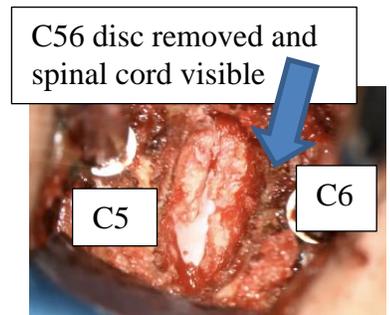
Moving the nerves and structures in the neck causes hoarseness. The hoarseness usually improves after a few weeks.

Moving the esophagus aside causes trouble swallowing after surgery. The trouble swallowing usually improves after a few weeks.

I place an instrument called a retractor to hold back the vital organs including the esophagus and blood vessels. I take an x-ray to confirm that I am in the correct spot.

Will you remove the entire disc?

Yes. I will completely remove the disc on both sides. I will also remove the bone spurs. Removing the disc and bone spurs increases the space for the nerves. Increasing the space for the nerves treats the stenosis.



How Do You Perform a Disc Replacement?

After I have removed the disc, I have to place something into the space where the disc was located in order to maintain proper alignment and separation of the bones. Instead of placing a metallic cage and a plate and screws, I would place a ball and socket joint into the disc space. Disc replacements are intended to preserve motion at the operative level. In general, disc replacements do not work well if someone has a great deal of pre-existing arthritis, bone spurs, disc space collapse. If I recommended a fusion, it means that I do not believe that you are a good candidate for a disc replacement.



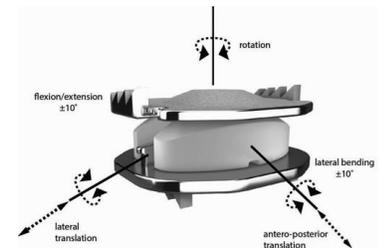
Are you familiar with disc replacements? Do you perform artificial disc replacements?

Yes and yes. I do disc replacements (most commonly the Simplify Medical disc). I have done extensive research on disc replacements. I am actually the lead author on several disc important replacement publications.

Five-year clinical results of cervical total disc replacement compared with anterior discectomy and fusion for treatment of 2-level symptomatic degenerative disc disease: a prospective, randomized, controlled, multicenter investigational device exemption clinical trial

Kris Radcliff, MD,¹ Domagoj Coric, MD,² and Todd Albert, MD³

¹Department of Orthopedic Surgery, Thomas Jefferson University, Rothman Institute, Egg Harbor, New Jersey; ²Carolinas Medical Center, Carolina Neurosurgery & Spine Associates, Charlotte, North Carolina; and ³Hospital for Special Surgery, Weill Cornell Medical College, New York, New York



How Does Disc Replacement Differ from Fusion?

In a fusion, the disc is removed. Then a plate and screw is applied. The plate and screws hold the bones together in the proper position. Holding the bones into the proper position helps to lead to a successful fusion. The fused segment does not move.



8/5/2022



Will I have a plate and screws?

No

Will I Be Able to Feel the Disc Replacement?

No.

How Much Motion Will I Lose?

You should not lose motion. Each disc moves about 4 degrees. The overall neck movement is over 100 degrees. Many patients actually report MORE motion after surgery because they have less pain.

Will you see other areas and fix other areas in the surgery?

No. I can only see the levels that I operate on.

Can you see nerve damage at the time of surgery?

No. The nerves are encased within a thin membrane called dura. I do not see the nerves directly.

Can I have an MRI with all of that metal?

Yes. The titanium plate, screws, and cage are MRI compatible.

Will I go off in the airport?

Not sure. It is possible. I can give you a note if you would like, but in my experience, notes do not help.

How Long Does the Surgery Take?

The surgery takes about 1.5-2 hours

Will I Have Sutures or Staples?

The incision will be closed with dissolvable sutures. There is no need to remove sutures after surgery. I will place special glue over the incision.

What kind of anesthesia is used?

You will be under general anesthesia.

How long will I stay in the hospital?

Following this surgery most patients will go home on the same day if only a single level is being performed. For two or more levels, patients usually spend the night in the hospital. The term for staying overnight is either “inpatient” or “extended stay recovery.”

What is the Difference Between Inpatient And a Same Day Surgery?

It depends on your insurance. Some insurances consider this surgery to include an overnight hospital stay. Some insurances believe that you should go home on the day of surgery after this procedure.

If the Insurance Considers This To Be A Same Day Surgery Do I Have To Go Home On The Surgery Day?

No. The insurance designation DOES NOT MATTER and does not change our plans. Even if your insurance considers this procedure to be a surgery that would go home on the say day, I can choose to keep you in the hospital overnight for various medical reasons including help with walking, pain control, or physical therapy.

Who Makes The Decision About Whether I Go Home After Surgery?

I will tell you. If we discuss you staying overnight, please trust that you will stay overnight regardless of whatever the insurance says. Likewise, if we discuss you going home, you will go home. Sometimes, hospital staff or other people may not be aware of our discussion and may tell you what the insurance says. Please disregard any information about inpatient status that contradicts what we discussed. If my recommendation changes, I will advise you directly.

Is the Surgery Minimally Invasive?

Yes. You will have a small incision on the skin. The entire procedure is performed under magnification and/or a microscope. Your major muscles are not cut.

Will I Be Paralyzed After This Surgery?

No. Severe neurological injury causing paralysis is extremely rare. We will discuss in detail if I have a concern about the health and safety of your spinal cord injury.

What technology is available to help make the surgery safer?

I use a computerized monitoring system to follow the safety of your spinal cord on all cervical spine surgeries. Every move and intervention is carefully monitored. If there is the slightest hint of a problem, I will intervene.

Who operates the neuromonitoring technology? How do you do that and perform surgery at the same time?

There is a neurophysiologist present who sets up the monitoring equipment (it is similar to an EKG). There is another doctor (a neurological in most cases) who reviews the computer information and is in constant communication with me throughout the surgery. The technology enables us to identify neurological problems before they become permanent.



What is the neuromonitoring company's name and information?

<https://www.accurateneuromonitoring.com/for-patient/>

Address: 700 US Highway 46 East, Suite 420, Fairfield, NJ, 07004

Phone: 973-882-3456

Fax: 973-882-3450

Email: info@accurateiom.com

Please feel free to call them if you have any questions about the neuromonitoring process or their bill. They are contracted by the hospital and thus I do not have access to their billing information.

OUTCOME

What Is the Expected Outcome?

Your pain will be better. However, I cannot promise that you will be pain free. Surgery can help improve function and decrease pain, but surgery is fundamentally fixing something "broken." It is important to focus on this and to mentally prepare yourself so that you put yourself on a reasonably successful path to recovery. Believe me, I would love it if you had a perfect recovery. I just cannot promise that.

How does pain improve after surgery?

In general, surgery is less effective for the treatment of neck pain than for arm pain. Cervical surgery is, overall, more effective for the treatment of arm pain. At 8-10 years approximately 60% of patient are satisfied with the results of surgery for cervical disc herniations and spinal stenosis. In general, about 70% of pain improves. For example, patient who have 10/10 pain prior to surgery improve to about 3/10 pain after surgery. Overall activity and physical function improve gradually after surgery. Overall, in long term studies, only about 5-8% of patients are worse following surgery.

I have had problems for a long time before surgery. Will that affect my outcome?

Patients who have had longstanding problems and are de-conditioned before surgery will require longer postoperative rehabilitation.

Do statistics guarantee that a specific amount of improvement for me?

No. Although the statistics are helpful to understand the overall outcome for many patients, they do not guarantee the odds of success or failure in any individual case. With any surgical procedure, some patients are improved, some patients are unchanged, and some patients have worse symptoms. There is some variability in how quickly patients improve following surgery.

What is the overall recovery period from a disc replacement?



3 months is the typical recovery period.

When can I expect pain to be reduced?

Patients' arm pain is usually improved/reduced immediately after surgery. About 10-20% of patient's pain will continue until the nerves start to heal.

Why does my pain not go away immediately?

When I relieve pressure on an inflamed, damaged nerve, it does not recover instantaneously. In most cases, by reducing pressure on the nerve, the nerve stops giving off painful stimuli.

Does the surgical procedure heal the nerve directly?

The surgical procedure does not heal the nerve, only the body is capable of that. The goal of surgery is to create the best possible environment for the body to heal itself and to prevent further damage. This will take a variable length of time depending on the duration and degree of nerve damage and the body's own healing abilities. Most of the healing occurs in the first few months.

When can I expect weakness to improve?

Weakness can take 3-6 months to improve. The amount of time that your nerves have been compressed can influence how quickly you recover after surgery. In the setting of severe compression which has been present for greater than 1 year, nerves may never fully recovery or take some time to do so.

Other factors, such as age, overall physical condition, and severity of nerve damage affect weakness recovery. Your weakness may never improve after surgery.

When can I expect numbness to improve?

Numbness can take 6-12 months to improve. The amount of improvement in numbness is also dependent on the level of numbness prior to surgery and the length of time that numbness has been present. Other factors, such as age, diabetes overall physical condition, and severity of nerve damage affect numbness recovery. Your numbness may never improve after surgery.

Is it possible that I will have new nerve symptoms after surgery?

Yes. You can have new pain, weakness, and numbness that is worse than the preoperative symptoms especially temporarily. These new symptoms, if present, likely represent inflammation or edema in the nerves that occurs as a result of surgical manipulation and decompression. One common new symptom that occurs after cervical spine surgery is a C5 palsy. C5 palsy causes weakness in the shoulder muscles and biceps.

What if I Have More Numbness After Surgery?

You may experience more hand or arm numbness after surgery.

Will my neck hurt more after surgery?

Yes. People often have more pain in the back of the neck over the muscles. That pain is due to realignment of the spine and stretching the muscles. This surgery will make you slightly (1-2mm) taller! Your muscles need time to adjust for that.

What can I take for the neck pain and stiffness?

You will be given muscle relaxers to treat the pain and stiffness in the back of the neck. I suggest that you use them instead of opioid medications.

What factors related to my spine may contribute to a poor outcome after surgery?

Previous surgery, scar tissue, the size of the disc herniation, the duration of symptoms, response to previous treatments such as epidurals, arachnoiditis, migrated or extruded fragments, calcified disc or epidural scarring (due to previous epidurals or intrathecal procedures such as myelograms), or congenital abnormalities can all adversely affect the outcome of surgery.

In addition, obesity, smoking, osteoporosis, cancer, poor nutrition, noncompliance, diabetes, autoimmune conditions, and being on blood thinners can negatively affect the outcome of surgery and the risk of complications. For example, being on blood thinners increases your risk of serious bleeding called a hematoma.

Does myelopathy get better?

Not necessarily. The goal of surgery in these cases is to prevent further loss of nerve function. If untreated, myelopathy progresses in 75% of patients.

Does surgery reverse nerve damage that has already occurred?

No.

Why will swallowing be difficult after this surgery?

I have to move the food tube aside (the esophagus) to get to your spine to do the surgery. Inevitably, moving the esophagus aside causes swelling and inflammation that makes swallowing difficult temporarily.

What can I eat after surgery?

Your diet will begin with clear liquids, and be advanced to a mechanical soft diet as soon as your condition permits. You should eat foods that are easy to swallow.

What are examples of GOOD foods to eat?

Typical good choices are ground food (such as chili or meat sauce), scrambled eggs, pudding, shakes. You want to select foods that do not require a lot of chewing.

What are examples of BAD foods to eat?

Typical bad choices are foods that need a lot of chewing (such as a large piece of meat or bread), large pills, and thin liquids. Make sure that you have a drink available to help if you have trouble swallowing.

What are the risk factors for having swallowing problems after this surgery?

Length of surgery, number of levels being repaired in surgery, previous swallowing difficulties, age (elderly patients have more difficulty with swallowing) are common risk factors. In general, surgeries closer to the mouth (higher cervical levels such as C34) have more difficulty swallowing than surgeries closer to the chest.

What if I am nervous about having swallowing problems?

Let me know. We can discuss whether it is possible to do surgery on the back of the neck as an alternative.

What is the worst-case scenario for swallowing problems?

It is possible that you may need a temporary feeding tube (PEG) in your stomach and not be allowed to eat anything by mouth after surgery.

How long do swallowing problems after surgery last?

Everyone has trouble swallowing at 2 weeks (over 95% of patients). By six weeks about 40% of patients report trouble swallowing. At three months, only about 10% of patients have trouble swallowing.

What do you do if I have trouble swallowing?

I usually wait for three months, because the swallowing often improves by three months anyway. Most other doctors (such as ENT specialists) will not intervene before three months.

What if I have problems at three months?

Then I will order a barium swallow evaluation, an ENT consultation, and a speech therapy consultation in most cases. The ENT doctors can look down your throat to see if there is something affecting your swallowing.

Can I have new hoarseness after this surgery?

Your voice may be high or weak after surgery. That is common due to manipulation of the nerves in surgery. It will improve after a few weeks in most cases.

What if I have hoarseness after a few weeks?



At three months, I will send you to see an ENT specialist to take a look at your vocal cords. Inevitably, they will find that one of the vocal cords is not moving normally and is partially or completely paralyzed. That will improve will time.

Will I have a catheter in my bladder?

Usually no. If you have a history of trouble urinating (prostate problems, etc.) then the anesthesiologists and hospitalists may recommend it.

What if I cannot urinate after surgery?

Some patients may have difficulty urinating after surgery. If this occurs, notify your nurse who may assist you in voiding techniques. This may require placing a catheter in your bladder.

What if I cannot move my bowels after surgery?

After surgery, constipation frequently occurs from inactivity and the side effects of pain medication. Stool softeners and laxatives will be available from your nurse. Once you go home, you can also take some over the counter stool softeners and laxatives. Use of opioid pain medication and prolonged rest may cause constipation. Drinking plenty of fluids and eating high fiber foods (whole grains, raw fruits and vegetables) will help regain normal bowel function.

What can I do to help move my bowels?

Chewing gum! Chewing gum helps to activate the bowels.

What if I lose control of my urination or bowels after surgery?

That could be an emergency! Tell your nurse or call me immediately.

What if I am numb around my genital (private area)? Is that normal?

No! That is never normal. Tell your nurse or call me immediately.

What can I do to help my breathing after surgery?

Deep breathing is very important after surgery to maintain lung expansion and reduce the risk of pneumonia. You will be provided with an incentive spirometer and instructed about its use. This device should be used every 15 to 30 minutes during your wakeful hours initially, then every 1 to 2 hours as your activity returns to normal. This device is yours to take home. Continue to use it at home for at least 1 week after your discharge. (Use it during TV commercial breaks).

AFTER THE OPERATION

Will you speak to my family?

Yes. After surgery, I will meet with your family in the surgical waiting room unless



otherwise arranged. If I miss them, don't worry. I will find them later. My cellphone is 609-225-4804 if for some reason they don't hear from me.

Will Other Doctors Will See Me After Surgery?

Medical doctors will also consult on your case after surgery if you stay in the hospital.

What do the medical doctors do?

They will see you before surgery in Preadmission testing. These providers have almost decades of experience caring for patients who have undergone spine surgery. They will check your "non-spinal" parts including your heart, lungs, kidneys, etc. They will order the labs that they believe are necessary for you to safely get through surgery. They will review your clearance. They may order additional tests (EKG, echocardiograms, etc.).

Do I need a clearance from my own primary care or cardiologist?

Yes. You should check with them and have them send over a clearance letter. However, you will still have to go to preadmission testing and undergo a second clearance process based upon our hospital standards.

So, my clearance from my primary care doctor or cardiologist may not be enough?

Yes. Each hospital has different rules and standards. Part of our success has been with increased scrutiny for preadmission testing. Your internist or cardiologist may not be as familiar with the surgery as our hospital doctors are. Our medical specialists often order additional tests to ensure that you will be safe in surgery based upon their knowledge of the surgery.

Where does Dr. Radcliff perform surgery?

Capital Health Medical Center (Hopewell). 1 Capital Way, Pennington, NJ 08534. (800) 637-2374. <https://www.capitalhealth.org/>

Robert Wood Johnson (Hamilton). 1 Hamilton Health Pl, Hamilton Township, NJ 08690. (609) 586-7900. <https://www.rwjbh.org/rwj-university-hospital-hamilton/>

Shore Medical Center 100 Medical Center Way, Somers Point, NJ 08244 (609) 653-3500 <https://shoremedicalcenter.org/>

Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, 132 S 10th St, Philadelphia, PA 19107, 215-955-6000, <https://www.jeffersonhealth.org/index.html>

What is the process for testing and clearance prior to surgery?

You will have to go to the hospital where your surgery is planned in order to obtain "clearance."



How long does it take to get cleared for surgery?

It depends on your health. If you are healthy and regularly see a physician, it could be only 5-7 days. If you have severe health problems, it could take a month or more.

Who will tell me about my medicines (diabetes medicines, blood pressure medicines, blood thinners, etc.) before surgery?

The medical doctors in the preadmission testing center will give you specific recommendations.

Do I need to stop aspirin for my heart before surgery?

No. Do not stop taking aspirin if your doctor has told you to take it.

Who will see me after surgery?

The same doctors who saw you in the pre-admission testing center will also see you while you are in the hospital. I believe that the best possible outcome occurs when the medical doctors meet you beforehand, learn about your medical needs, and then follow you after surgery. They will function like your primary care doctors in the hospital.

Is the surgery very painful?

No. I am committed to making your surgery as painless as possible. I have developed an advanced protocol to control your pain after surgery. A group of doctors, including our anesthesiologists, medical doctors, nurses, physician assistants, and myself reviewed medical studies and created a comprehensive protocol to control your pain. We start pain medications before your surgery even begins! During surgery, we run specialized intravenous continuous drips that prevent your body's pain receptor nerves from ever becoming activated.

With this protocol in place, we have achieved postoperative pain scores that are in the **97-99th percentile** for hospitals within the United States based on a recent survey. We also reduced patient's opioid consumption 30%.

If needed, you will have access to Percocet, Roxicodone, or Vicodin. I will also prescribe Dilaudid for intravenous pain medication if needed. However, the opioid medications can create constipation and urinary retention, so use them with care.

When does the pain management protocol start?

Before surgery. It is reinforced during surgery. It is further implemented after surgery.

Will I have access to opioid medication if I need them?

Opioid pain medication will be available for pain relief after surgery. The possible effects vary among patients and may include: sleepiness, nausea, constipation, flushing, sweating, and occasionally euphoria or confused feelings.

What can I do before surgery to control my pain after surgery?

It is important that you reduce your opioid medication prior to surgery. By decreasing your tolerance your body may respond better to postoperative pain medications such as these opioids.

Will I Have to Wear A Collar?

No

What can I do to prepare for activities after surgery?

Activities that include bending/twisting/lifting such as laundry, grocery shopping, caring for pets should be left for others to care for, to avoid potential injury. Possible items to create a safer environment are listed below.

- ***A “grabber” device.*** Bending and reaching up can be avoided with this lightweight tool, often sold at pharmacies and discount stores.
- ***Toilet and shower equipment.*** Adding a shower mat, toilet riser, and a shower seat makes the bathroom safer and easier to use. Home health equipment is often covered by insurance.
- ***A cane or walker.*** Patients who think a cane or walker would help them feel more stable can discuss this option with the surgeon.
- ***A mini-fridge or cooler.*** Keeping cool drinks and ice packs close at hand helps patients avoid climbing stairs more than necessary.
- ***A recliner or extra cushions.*** The seating position in a recliner takes some pressure off the lower back. Sitting on a cushioned surface is also likely to be more comfortable.
- ***Fall prevention.*** It is best to remove anything that may be a tripping hazard, such as loose rugs or clutter. Some people also install handrails as needed, such as on stairs or in the shower.

Why Do I Feel Exhausted After Surgery?

It is very common to feel run down a couple weeks after surgery because your body is getting acclimated to the new changes in your body. You should walk around to help increase blood flow throughout your body. Shifting positions frequently between standing, sitting, and lying down are good to help avoid pain/stiffness. Gradually increasing physical activities are good, but should be stopped if you start to experience increasing pain or exhaustion. You should not do activities that require bending at the waist and lifting anything over 15 pounds or a gallon of milk.



Do I have sleep in a recliner?

No. Sleep in whatever position is most comfortable. If you like to sleep in a recliner feel free to do so.

Can I have sleep in my bed?

Yes. Sleep in whatever position is most comfortable. If you like to sleep in your bed feel free to do so.

Do I need to sleep in a hospital bed?

No. Most patients are most comfortable in their own beds.

Can I move when I sleep? Can I sleep on my side?

Yes. You will not do damage to your neck from sleeping in a certain position or turning when you sleep.

Are there specific pillows or mattresses that you recommend?

No. Pillows and mattresses are very individualized. Many of my patients like shredded memory foam pillows, however.

Will I need physical therapy?

Maybe. Regular exercise, including physical therapy, is thought to help prevent binding of the cervical roots through fibrous adhesions called epidural fibrosis. Specific stretches can help reduce effects of postoperative scarring around the nerve root resulting in better outcomes. Therapy can also improve blood flow which will help your nerve heal and muscle heal. You will begin exercising and moving immediately after surgery. You may be able to do the exercises on your own to recondition your spine. If you have special circumstances, then I will order physical therapy. I usually wait for the incision to heal and for early healing to occur. If necessary, I will prescribe physical therapy at about one month after surgery.

Will I need inpatient rehab?

No. The most important rehab is to walk as much as possible.

If do I need inpatient rehab where should I go?

I suggest that you contact your insurance. Popular rehabilitation facilities include Moss, Magee, Kessler, Bacharach.

Will I be able to stand and walk after surgery?

Yes. The nurse or therapist will assist you in getting out of bed a few hours after surgery. You will be instructed to be up walking every 2 to 3 hours during the day and evening. The nurse will allow you to do this independently once you are steady and feel comfortable.



Is activity helpful for my recovery?

Yes. Early activity after surgery is extremely important to help prevent the complications of prolonged bed rest such as pneumonia and blood clots. It also promotes recovery, relieves muscle stiffness, allows for development of a well-organized scar, and improves your outlook.

Can I start my own exercise program with a trainer or someone?

No. Please do not start any exercise programs unless discussed with me.

What are the lifting restrictions after surgery?

15lbs for the first six weeks. That is the weight of two gallons of milk. Lifting weights increases stress and pressure on the cervical spine and surgical site. I would like the area to heal before we increase your activity tolerance.

What do postoperative x-rays show?

The x-rays show the position of the bones and confirm that the disc replacement is moving properly.

Do I need to have x-rays to advance my weight limit and tolerance?

No. By the time your x-rays show healing (at six months), you will have forgotten about all of this! I base the decision to advance your weightbearing on your pain, activity tolerance, bone quality, and your preferences.

Can I damage my neck from turning my neck doing routine things such as talking or driving?

No. You will not do damage to your neck just from routine activities and driving. In fact, the motion will help to recondition your neck muscles.

Why is there a limit on neck motion (90 degrees) if I cannot damage the neck with activity?

I worry about extreme bending and craning your neck. You will not do damage to your neck from routine activities such as talking on the telephone, typing, and minor recreational activities.

When can I resume running and bicycling?

I worry about the repetitive loading to your neck. I suggest that you wait six weeks at least.

When can I resume golf?

Six to twelve weeks

When can I resume sedentary (office) work with a 10lb limit?

The earliest is 2-3 weeks to resume desk (sedentary) work. Most patients do not get back to light work until about six weeks.

When can I resume heavy work with a 50lb or more limit?

The earliest is 10 weeks to resume heavy work. Most patients do not get back to heavy work until about 4 months after surgery. It is possible that you will never be able to resume heavy work.

Will you do disability forms for me?

Yes. You have to start the disability process. If your employer requires documentation of your work status, our office will provide the necessary information to your employer or other concerned parties. All disability matters have to be handled through the office (so that the paperwork is filed and stamped in the Rothman charts). Please do not bring disability paperwork to the hospital.

When can I go out of work?

In general, I will take you out of work from the date of surgery. I cannot take you out of work prior to the date of my initial visit with you.

Can I smoke nicotine products?

Smoking is absolutely forbidden. There is clear evidence that smoking dramatically increases your risk of post-operative complications. Most insurances will deny surgery if you smoke and will make you get urine nicotine testing. You should avoid tobacco exposure for at least six weeks prior to surgery and for two years after surgery. Second hand smoke also applies.

Can I use cannabis?

I do not know. There is little research on cannabis either way because it remains a federally illegal substance. I do not have a license to prescribe cannabis.

When can I bathe?

You should sponge bath only for the first week after surgery.

Should I get the incision wet?

After postoperative day 5

Can I soak the incision underwater?

Please do not soak the incision under water (either in a bath tub or in a swimming pool or the ocean) prior to the postoperative check at two weeks.

Can I apply ointments to the incision?

No. Do not apply any ointments or creams.

What will hold the skin together?

Absorbable sutures which are buried. On the outside there will be crazy glue (Dermabond).

When are the postop appointments?

2 weeks, 6 weeks, 3 months, 6 months, 1 year and 2 years from surgery.

Do I see Dr. Radcliff at every visit?

No. The 2-week visit is usually a wound check done with my physician assistant. I am of course always around and available.

When should I call?

Please take your temperature every afternoon for the first week after you are discharged from the hospital. Call your physician at 609-952-5243 if:

1. Your temperature is more than 101.5 degrees,
2. Your incision becomes reddened, swollen
3. You develop any problems urinating or passing bowel movements.
4. You develop worsening problems with breathing
5. Any increase or change in drainage occurs.
6. You develop headaches, light sensitivity, or other serious concerns
7. You develop worsening problems with swallowing
7. You have any other serious concerns.

Does diet affect my healing?

Yes. A well-balanced diet is necessary for good healing and recovery. This includes food from the four basic food groups: dairy products, meat, vegetables and fruit.

Are specific vitamins necessary for healing?

You should take a multivitamin. You should also take a combination Vitamin D supplement/calcium supplement daily for six months. During this healing period, your calcium and Vitamin D requirements are increased. One brand that I commonly recommend is Os-Cal D

Will my pain not go away immediately?

Not necessarily. Although the surgery is intended to relieve the pressure on the damaged nerves, the pain does not immediately abate because the nerves need time to heal.

Does the surgical procedure heal the nerve directly?

The surgical procedure does not heal the nerve, only the body is capable of that. The goal of surgery is to create the best possible environment for the body to heal itself and to prevent further damage. Nerve healing will take a variable length of time depending on the duration and degree of nerve damage and the body's own healing abilities. Most of the healing occurs in the first few months.

When should I begin weaning pain medications?

If possible, I would like you to be off of opioids by the two week postoperative visit. Therefore, please start weaning by the end of the first week. You can continue to use the non-opioid pain medications including Celebrex and Gabapentin.

Can you call in a refill of opioid medications after hours?

Opioid pain medications cannot be refilled at night or over the weekend, or holiday.

What are the laws in New Jersey about pain medications?

In New Jersey, there is a recent law that only **five day prescriptions** of opioid pain medications can be given to a patient in moderate to severe acute pain (http://www.nj.com/politics/index.ssf/2017/02/bill_limitig_painkiller_prescription_on_christies.html).

What if the patient needs more than 5 days of pain medication?

To address concerns about patients with pain that exceeds 5 days, the law allows physicians to easily add another 5 days to the original opioid prescription if the patient's pain has not subsided.

What if I need opioids after the first five days?

If you need even short term opioids beyond the first refill, I will refer you to a pain management specialist. The pain management specialists

INSURANCE

Are you in most major insurance networks?

Yes. We take all major insurances. In general, if you are able to see me in the office, I am in your insurance network. Before surgery, my office will precertify the surgery codes with your insurance and will notify you of potential charges and insurance participation.

Is the hospital in network?

Yes. In fact, before surgery, my office will confirm that your surgery is covered by insurance. If needed, please feel free to contact my prior authorization representative Brittany Herron, Surgical Precert, (267) 339-3543. All of the hospital physicians, including the ER doctors, radiologists, anesthesiologists, hospitalists, etc. are also in network.

Do you have any out of network assistants?

No

What are the insurance company criteria for surgery? Who writes them?

Each insurance company has its own specific criteria to determine when a surgery is appropriate which they call “medically necessary.” The criteria are quite subjective and often change.

What if surgery is denied?

If that happens, I will do a call with another physician to review your case. Usually that first level appeal occurs with a non-spine physician such as a pediatrician or gynecologist. If that appeal is unsuccessful, then the second level appeal occurs with a spine specialist. It can take over a month.

COMPLICATIONS

What Kinds of Complications Can Occur?

There are three categories of complications after spine surgery: perioperative complications (which generally occur immediately after surgery), long term outcome (at six to twelve months after surgery), and the risk of additional procedures in the future. Although I endeavor to list all complications that a reasonable person would want to know, there is always a possibility of other, unforeseen rare complications occurring. There are other, more rare complications, that can occur that are not always possible to anticipate or list.

What are anesthesia related complications of cervical spine surgery?

Some complications that can occur after anesthesia include blindness, shoulder injury, brachial plexus injury, anesthesia reaction, transfusion reaction, and even death. Some patients may need a special type of intubation such as indirect laryngoscopy (Glide scope) or awake fiber optic intubation.

What are the general complications that can occur after any surgery?

Some complications that can occur after any surgery include pneumonia, deep venous thrombosis (blood clots), phlebitis, pulmonary embolism, renal failure, heart attack, cardiac arrest, stroke, aspiration pneumonia, delayed bowel function (ileus), urinary retention (from genitourinary problems other than neurogenic bladder), C. Diff infection, diarrhea, worsening vision or blindness, blood loss, allergic reaction to medications, and even death.



What are the specific complications of an anterior cervical surgery?

Some complications that specifically occur after an anterior cervical surgery include including C5 palsy, infection(wound, discitis, osteomyelitis, epidural abscess), spinal fluid leak, dural tear, new numbness/weakness in other nerves, airway hematoma, epidural hematoma, failure to heal, symptomatic instrumentation, swallowing difficulty, voice difficulty, development of symptoms at another part of the spine, dysphagia, dysphonia, paralysis (it is extremely rare), esophagus injury, blood vessel injury (either carotid or vertebral artery), Horner's syndrome, ptosis, implant malposition or migration, nerve root injury, allergy to metal, pseudarthrosis, adjacent level ossification disease, heterotopic ossification, subsidence, recurrence of stenosis at the operative level.

What are the other complications that can occur following a spinal surgery?

Some of the possible complications following any surgery on the spine include persistent pain/failure to alleviate symptoms or worsening symptoms, worse postoperative pain, other organ injury, neurogenic bladder (usually from spinal cord injury), neurogenic bowel, sexual dysfunction, instability of the spine, need for further surgery/reoperation, non-improvement or worsening myelopathy, prolonged intubation, arachnoid cyst, and arachnoiditis (i.e., scarring of the nerves in the dural sac).

What are the other risks of spine surgery?

The risks of surgery have been well studied. The table below is taken from a published reference that is commonly used in England called the International Spine Surgery Information Sheet. These rates are not necessarily my own personal rates. They are the rates published in the medical literature.

SPECIFIC RISKS & COMPLICATIONS

Relevant to you	Complication	Leading to	Odds
	Nerve root injury	Pain/weakness/numbness in the arm / leg. The impairment may be temporary or permanent.	1 in 60
	Damage to the nerves supplying the bladder (cauda equina syndrome)	No control or reduced control passing urine or faeces. Weakness and/or numbness in the legs.	1 in 100
	Tear of the lining of spinal canal (dura)	Headache and a leaky wound. Occasionally a second operation to repair the tear (1 in 300).	1 in 20
	Infection	Wound discharge, fever and chills.	1 in 50
	Wound swelling (Seroma)	Fluid collection under the skin. Majority amenable to aspiration alone. Occasionally wound is re-opened to drain.	1 in 60
	Recurrent disc herniation	Recurrence of pain requiring second operation either within a few days or at any time in the future.	1 in 20
	Respiratory	Need for support of ventilation. Occasionally emergency operation to relieve the obstruction (1 in 50)	1 in 30
	Oesophageal (gullet) injury	Difficulty with swallowing. Generally temporary. Re-operation to repair the oesophagus may be needed (1 in 100)	1 in 12
	Recurrent laryngeal nerve injury	Hoarse voice – temporary (common) or permanent (rare).	1 in 20
	Vertebral artery injury	Bleeding	1 in 300
	Failure of bone healing (non-union)	Persistent pain. Recurrence of deformity.	1 in 6
	Bone graft donor site pain	Pain.	1 in 8
	Hardware breakage / loosening, Dislocation of implant	Pain. Recurrent deformity. Probable second operation to re-position or remove any implant.	1 in 100
	Pedicle screw malposition	Weakness / numbness / bleeding / lung injury	1 in 25
	Intestine (gut) blockage (ileus)	Distended abdomen, vomiting and constipation.	1 in 100
	Retrograde ejaculation	Infertility.	1 in 75
	Spinal cord injury	Loss of arm and leg function: Quadriplegia / Paraplegia – permanent. Quadriparesis / Paraparesis – may be temporary or permanent.	1 in 250

http://download.lww.com/wolterskluwer_vitalstream_com/PermaLink/BRS/A/BRS_2010_12_08_NG_204359_SDC1.pdf

What are the specific risks of an anterior cervical approach?

Patients often have trouble swallowing and trouble with the voice following anterior cervical surgery. Patients who have surgery at higher levels closer to the mouth (such as C34), multilevel surgeries (3 or more discs), or a history of trouble swallowing often have more problems after surgery.

What if you slip and lose control of the instruments?

I am trained to handle the surgical instruments safely around the spine in a manner that is safe and avoids injury to vital structures.

Ok. There are a lot of possible complications. What are the ones that I should really worry about?

Swallowing difficulty and hoarseness are discussed above. Those are the most common complications. I also really worry about bleeding (a hematoma) that can affect the windpipe (airway hematoma) or spinal cord (epidural hematoma).

I also worry about infection. An infection may present with wound drainage, fevers, chills, worsening pain, redness, weakness, numbness, tingling, or worsening trouble



swallowing. I have done extensive research on infections, and I go out of my way to take steps to reduce your risk of infection.

Is it possible that I will need another surgery in the future?

Yes. You may need another surgery in the future, either to treat a complication (such as an infection) or to treat pain or another spinal problem. In the case of a cervical disc replacement, more surgery is necessary about 10% of the time at about 5 years. Possible reasons for additional surgery include failure of the healing at the first level, development of problems at another level, broken instrumentation, spondylolisthesis, instability, scar tissue buildup, junctional breakdown.

Where can I look for additional information?

A Better Way Back is an online information source with credible information. I strongly suggest that you review that program first before doing a Google Search.

Better way back has a section on basic spine anatomy.

<https://www.thebetterwayback.org/intro-to-spine/>

Better way back has a section on spine conditions.

<https://www.thebetterwayback.org/pain-and-conditions/>

Better way back has a section on treatments.

<https://www.thebetterwayback.org/treatment-options/>

Better way back has a section on advanced resources including a nationwide ambassador program that you can call or text and resources for your caregivers.

<https://www.thebetterwayback.org/patient-ambassadors/>

<https://www.thebetterwayback.org/emotional-support/>

<https://www.thebetterwayback.org/caregivers-guide/>

The First Week

- Early to bed, late to rise and frequent rest periods throughout the day. Get at least 8 hours of sleep each night. A disrupted sleep pattern is common after discharge from the hospital and will return to normal over time.
- You may not drive, but you may be driven, for short distances, using proper restraints such as shoulder and lap belts for 2-4 WEEKS.
- No lifting of more than 15 pounds.
- May climb stairs with hand rail
- Begin a daily walking program with 1 to 2 blocks initially; schedule a daily time and increase distance daily.
- Eat a regular, balanced diet with plenty of fiber
- Take medications as prescribed, using narcotics as needed.

The Second Week

- Resume normal rising and retiring schedule, but continue to rest throughout the day.
- Eat plenty of fiber
- You may not drive.
- No lifting of anything weighing more than 15 pounds.
- May climb stairs with hand rail
- Continue scheduled walking, increasing distance and frequency as able.
- May resume sexual relations when comfortable.
- Begin narcotic weaning as pain diminishes, relying mainly on non-narcotic medications
- Follow-up in the office as scheduled, for further instructions.

The Third Week

- May start physical therapy if needed
- Resume normal rising and retiring schedule, resting as needed.
- Resume driving
- May resume light work around the home; lifting not to exceed 15 pounds.
- Continue scheduled walking.
- May Resume Sedentary Work In Special Circumstances

The Fourth Week

- Resume normal rising and retiring schedule, resting as needed.
- May resume light work around the home; lifting not to exceed 15 pounds.
- Continue scheduled walking.

The Sixth Week



- Follow-up visit.
- Discontinue weight limit. Ok to lift more than 15 pounds but less than 30 lbs.
- Resume sedentary work in most circumstances
- Initiate physical therapy

The Twelfth Week (3 Months)

- Follow-up visit or call to the office to cancel if you are doing well
- Conclude physical therapy or initiate more intense physical therapy

6 Months

- Follow-up visit or call to the office to cancel if you are doing well
- Conclude physical therapy
- Resume intense work

12 Months

- Follow-up visit or call to the office to cancel if you are doing well
- Assess mobility of disc replacement