



## How are Neck Problems Evaluated?

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**Bone Scans** – These are useful in revealing certain abnormalities such as infections, fractures, tumors and arthritis. Because bone scans cannot differentiate between these problems, they are usually performed in conjunction with other diagnostic tests.

## How Long is the Hospital Stay?

The time spent in the hospital after a cervical discectomy and fusion depends on several factors including your overall health and the extent of your particular surgery. Some people may be able to return home the same day while others may spend one to two days in the hospital.

## How Long Will it Take to Recover?

Recovery time after cervical discectomy and fusion varies depending on your particular situation, the number of levels involved, as well

as your general health. One key to a successful recovery is maintaining a positive attitude. You will be able to take short walks while in the hospital, and need to gradually increase the distance and frequency of your walks, once at home. If a fusion has been performed, it can take up to three months for the vertebrae to completely join together. Your doctor will give you specific instructions on activity levels, including when you can resume driving and return to work.

## What if I Have Other Questions?

Just give us a call. We'll be happy to answer any of your questions. We are committed to providing you with the highest quality of comprehensive spine care. If you have suggestions or comments, do not hesitate to let us know.

## Center for Spine Health

*A destination for comprehensive, quality spine care*

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# Cervical Discectomy & Fusion



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## What is a Cervical Discectomy and Fusion?

A cervical discectomy and fusion is a surgical procedure performed on the cervical (neck) region of the spine to help relieve pressure on nerves, and occasionally on the spinal cord, also. Over time, wear and tear, arthritis or an injury can damage the structures of the cervical spine resulting in pressure and irritation to nerves and nerve roots. This pressure can cause severe pain, discomfort, and numbness not only to the neck, but down the arms, as well. During the operation, a small incision is made, usually in the front of the neck, and the surgeon removes the bony material or disc that is causing the problem. In most cases, the surgeon then fuses or joins together the affected vertebrae using a bone graft or a bone graft and a metal plate.

## Why Does This Happen?

Frequent pain and/or numbness in the neck or down the arms will often result in a visit to the doctor. A diseased or damaged disc in the neck is a common cause of this pain or numbness, and can happen for a number of reasons. Over time, a disc can wear and “flatten,” resulting in the vertebrae above and below the

flattened disc to slide back and forth, or even touch. This can pinch or irritate the nerves causing pain and numbness. Another cause may be a sudden injury, resulting in a bulging or herniating disc, causing pressure on the nerves and nerve roots. Bony growths (spurs) can also form, and further narrow the pathways through which the nerves must travel.

## What are the Alternatives?

Surgery is usually the last option considered. If your symptoms are mild, you may not require any treatment. Other conservative treatments such as physical therapy, medications, and steroid injections may relieve symptoms for a time; however they usually do not permanently change the underlying cause of the problem.

Cervical discectomy and fusion may be the only solution, in some cases, to remove irritation and create more space for the nerves.

## How are Neck Problems Evaluated?

Your doctor will use a number of approaches to evaluate and diagnose neck problems such as a herniated disc.

These include:

**A Detailed History** – Your role in providing a detailed history is very important. Your doctor will need to know where and when it hurts, if there was a recent injury or fall, and a description of the pain. Are there positions or activities that make it feel worse? What makes it feel better? All of these details can help your doctor pinpoint the problem.

**A Physical Exam** – Once your history is given, a thorough exam by a spine expert is another important step in obtaining a good diagnosis.

**Diagnostic Imaging** – X-rays can show the structure and alignment of the vertebrae, as well as the presence and size of bone spurs or other bony abnormalities.

**CT or “computerized tomography”** – This is a special kind of x-ray machine. Rather than a single x-ray, a CT scanner sends out a number of beams at different angles. These images are then read by a computer, producing detailed cross-sections or “slices” that can show the shape and size of the spinal canal and the surrounding structures.

**MRI or “magnetic resonance imaging”** – MRI uses a powerful magnet to send radio waves into the body. The images produced are very helpful in visualizing the soft tissues such as the spinal cord, discs and nerve roots.

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