

Answers about Microsurgery Discectomy

What are the differences between an open back surgery and a METRx discectomy?

A METRx discectomy uses a much smaller incision, generally about an inch in length. This type of **back surgery** creates a small tunnel through the muscles in the back down to the area where the herniated disc is located. With the METRx system a burr is used to remove bone from the vertebrae to first get to the damaged disc. In comparison, an open discectomy involves a much larger incision and also involves stripping the muscles away from the spinal column and then removing bone so that the surgeon can see the area where the herniated disc is located. The actual surgical procedure, removing the fragments of the herniated disc, is very similar with both techniques. Usually both the METRx and open discectomy **back surgery** requires a general anesthetic or spinal anesthetic. Remember, with SED no muscles are stripped, no bone is removed and no scar tissue is created

How big is the actual incision for a METRx discectomy?

The tubular retractor that is used to create a tunnel down to the spinal column where the herniated disc is located measures 1.6 cm in diameter (about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch). The actual skin incision is a little bit longer than this, but is generally about an inch in length. This type of **back surgery** uses a "muscle splitting" approach, so that the tubular retractor is passed through a tunnel in the muscles of the back, rather than stripping them away from the spine, as in an open discectomy.

What are the results of METRx discectomy?

This type of **back surgery** procedure is relatively new to spine surgery, and there are no long-term results to show conclusively that this type of surgery is better than an open discectomy. However, patients who have had this type of surgery report high levels of satisfaction and pain relief that are equivalent or better than traditional open discectomy.

How dangerous is a METRx discectomy?

While all surgery involves risk, orthopedic and neurosurgeons who have advanced spine training take steps to minimize those risks. With the METRx technique, we are able to work in a surgical field that is illuminated by a very bright fiber-optic light source and magnified by a special type of video camera that provides incredible detail of the area that is being operated on. If the procedure can not be done safely with the microsurgery technique, then the surgeon can convert the procedure to an open discectomy.

How will I know if a METRx discectomy is right for me?

Your surgeon will be able to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this type of surgical procedure with you. He or she will be able to determine if the cause of your back pain is likely to get better with or without surgery, and what type of surgery is the most reliable method for decreasing your pain and relieving the symptoms of a herniated disc.