

Surgery for Lumbar Spinal Stenosis Provides More Pain Relief than Nonsurgical Treatment

Surgery is more effective than nonsurgical treatment in providing pain relief for patients with lumbar spinal stenosis, new study results find

At all update points, both the study participants who had surgery and who had non-surgical treatments showed improvement: however, the participants who had a laminectomy surgery showed greater improvement in their pain levels and ability to function, while those who had non-surgical treatments showed only a moderate improvement. The improvements were maintained at 2 years of followup

These above results stem from the Spine Patient Outcomes Research Trial (SPORT), a large 7-year trial undertaken at 13 prominent spine centers and sponsored by the National Institutes of Health. The study included 654 patients with lumbar spinal stenosis /// without associated degenerative spondylolisthesis

All study participants were candidates for surgery for their spinal stenosis, meaning that they had moderate to severe leg pain (sciatica) for at least 12 weeks. Lumbar spinal stenosis typically causes leg pain due to a narrowing of the spinal canal that pinches the nerve root and causes pain down the sciatic nerve

Study participants who had the surgery had standard posterior decompressive laminectomy, and those who had non-surgical care had one or a combination of at least active physical therapy (such as stretching, exercise), education for home exercise and ergonomics, and possibly nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs

[New England Journal of Medicine. 2008;358:794-810](#)