

Advanced Spine Institute
Minimally Invasive Spine Center
ALVARADO HOSPITAL

Posterior Cervical Foraminotomy

Definitions

Posterior – from the back

Cervical – neck

Foraminotomy – surgical procedure that is performed to enlarge the passageway where a spinal nerve root exits the spinal canal

While an anterior cervical discectomy is the most common treatment for disc herniation, a posterior cervical approach (from the back) can be performed without fusion to alleviate nerve pinching, depending on the exact location of the disc herniation. A foraminotomy is often used if the disc herniation pinches the nerve root or if there is pressure on the nerve from bone overgrowth (a bone spur or osteophyte).

The Procedure

Every case is different. However, in general, this surgery will proceed as follows:

- A small incision is made on the back of the neck.
- The muscles are gently moved to the side as the surgeon enters to reach the spine.
- Extreme care is taken to protect the muscles, arteries and nerves in the neck.
- After the correct level of the spine is identified on X-ray, a keyhole is made and a small opening is made next to the facet joint.
- Using an operating microscope to aid with visualization of the canal, the disc herniation and bone spurs causing pressure on the nerve are removed.
- At this point, the nerve may be drawn back and the disc removed.

The advantages are that a foraminotomy does not require fusion and it allows for treatment of several spinal motion segments. The disadvantages are that you cannot decompress a central disc herniation with foraminotomy, thus there can be an increased incidence of neck pain.

Risks and Complications

There is chance of a recurrent disc herniation because most of the disc is not removed. Each patient is different. Therefore, risks and complications may vary. Your surgeon will explain possible risks and complications related to your specific procedure.

After Surgery

As with most surgeries, it is normal for patients to feel some initial pain, especially at the incision site. However, most patients after this type of surgery are discharged the same day. In fact, patients are encouraged to be up and moving around within a few hours after surgery. Most patients will benefit from a post-operative exercise program or supervised physical therapy after surgery. They are encouraged to maintain a daily low-impact exercise program. Walking, and slowly increasing the distance each day, is the best exercise after this type of surgery. Some discomfort is normal, but pain is a signal to slow down and rest. Keep in mind, the amount of time it takes to return to normal activities is different for every patient. You should ask your doctor about exercises to help with recovery.

Outcome

The results of surgery vary because some people have more extensive disease than others. In general, some neck pain may persist, however, most patients can expect:

- Effectively reduced pain in the arms and shoulders caused by nerve compression.
- Improvement in their hand function
- Decreased numbness in the hands

For more information, contact the Advanced Spine Institute coordinator at 619-229-7046 or call our toll-free number at 800-ALVARADO (800-258-2723).

ABOUT US: Alvarado Hospital offers advanced, specialized healthcare services with more than 450 dedicated physicians, representing more than 40 medical and surgical specialties, 1,000 employees and 400 active volunteers. The hospital is conveniently located just off Interstate 8 and adjacent to San Diego State University.

Alvarado Hospital's programs include cardiac services, emergency medicine services, neuroscience, orthopedics, oncology, rehabilitation, general surgical services, sexual medicine, skull-base surgery, sleep center, surgical and medical weight reduction, and vascular services.

At Alvarado Hospital's Advanced Spine Institute, we are dedicated to providing a revolutionary approach to complete spine care that is unsurpassed. We've combined some of the area's best board-certified experts with leading-edge technology and state-of-the-art equipment, as well as a full range of dedicated support specialists—all under one roof.

Our goal is to optimize your spinal health and get you back to enjoying your everyday activities.