

Surgical discectomy can benefit some patients

Clinical question	How effective are surgical interventions for lumbar disc prolapse?
Bottom line	Surgical discectomy for carefully selected patients with sciatica due to lumbar disc prolapse provides faster relief from the acute attack than conservative management, although any positive or negative effects on the lifetime natural history of the underlying disc disease are still unclear.
Caveat	Microdiscectomy gives broadly comparable results to open discectomy. The evidence on other minimally invasive techniques remains unclear.
Context	Prolapsed lumbar discs account for less than 5% of all low-back problems, but are the most common cause of sciatica. Ninety per cent of acute attacks of sciatica settle with non-surgical management.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Gibson JNA et al. Surgical interventions for lumbar disc prolapse. This contains 40 trials and 2 quasi-randomised trials with sizes ranging from 29 to about 200 participants. Cochrane Reviews 2007, Issue 1.
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