**Herniated Disk in Lower Back: Treatment Options**

A slipped (herniated) disk is a problem with a cushion (disk) between the bones in your back and causes back or leg pain, or numbness and tingling in your legs. **This decision aid is not for people with back pain from other causes, a herniated disk without symptoms, or symptoms for less than 6 weeks.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient Questions</th>
<th>Shots in your back (epidural injections)</th>
<th>Surgery (open surgery)</th>
<th>Minimally invasive surgery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What does the treatment involve?</strong></td>
<td>A steroid shot is injected into your back to try to reduce swelling. It takes about an hour. You may need a driver to get home. Discuss costs.</td>
<td>Part of your disk is removed to reduce pressure on the nerves. Surgery takes about 2 hours and you may go home later that day. Discuss costs.</td>
<td>Part of your disk is removed to reduce pressure on the nerves. There is less damage to muscles nearby. Surgery takes about 1 hour and you may go home later that day. Discuss costs.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Will it help my pain?</strong></td>
<td>You may have less pain in 2 weeks or so. Pain will not be less in the long term compared to not having shots.</td>
<td>You may take 2 to 6 weeks to get better. Up to 95 out of 100 people (95%) get better, whether or not they have surgery.</td>
<td>You may take 2 to 8 weeks to get better. Results may be as good as with open surgery.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Might I get surgery later?</strong></td>
<td>About 12 out of 100 people (12%) have surgery by 1 year.</td>
<td>Up to 16 out of 100 people (16%) may have repeat surgery to treat pain that continues or comes back.</td>
<td>From 10 to 45 out of 100 people (10% to 45%) have repeat surgery to treat pain that continues or comes back.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **What are the side effects?** | Up to 13 out of 100 people (13%) may have worse pain, headache, flushing in the face, or change in voice that lasts for a few hours or days. | Out of 100 people, about:  
  - 30 (30%) have pain at site of surgery for a day or so  
  - 20 (20%) have back or leg pain for up to 3 weeks  
  - 20 (20%) have nausea  
  - 20 (20%) have muscle spasm or cramps | Out of 100 people, about:  
  - 30 (30%) have pain running down the leg for up to 3 weeks  
  - 7 (7%) have a burning feeling in the back for up to 2 months |
| **What are the risks?** | Up to 3 out of 100 people (3%) may have heavy bleeding or infection. | Out of 100 people, about:  
  - 4 (4%) have nerve damage  
  - 4 (4%) have the disk slip again  
  - 2 (2%) have an infection | Out of 100 people, about:  
  - 7 (7%) have nerve damage  
  - 7 (7%) have the disk slip again  
  - 2 (2%) have an infection |
| **When will I recover?** | You can be back to your usual activities the next day. | You can walk by 24 hours, and some return to usual activities by 2 weeks. | You can walk by 24 hours, and some return to usual activities by 2 weeks. |
NOTE: The following options were available but not selected when this decision aid was generated:

**Treatment without surgery**

*Option Grid offers frequent content updates to reflect the latest evidence.*

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