

# Epiduroscopic lumbar discectomy through the sacral hiatus for sciatica

Information for the public

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## What has NICE said?

There is not enough evidence to be sure about how well epiduroscopic lumbar discectomy through the sacral hiatus for sciatica works or how safe it is. For this reason, it should only be done as part of a research study.

The procedure should only be done by surgeons with expertise in spinal surgery using an endoscope (a thin tube with a camera on the end). This should include training in using an endoscope through the sacral hiatus (a gap in the sacrum, the bone at the bottom of the spine) and in the area around the lumbar spine (lower back).

More research on this procedure is needed, and NICE may look at it again if more evidence is published.

## What does this mean for me?

Your health professional can only offer you this procedure as part of a research study. Details of your procedure will be collected.

### Other comments from NICE

NICE said that epiduroscopic lumbar discectomy through the sacral hiatus may be useful for treating different areas of the spine at the same time.

## The condition

The tough outer cover of a disc is called the annulus. It can sometimes weaken or tear, allowing the soft centre to bulge through. This is called herniation, also known as a 'slipped disc'. If it presses on a nerve, the slipped disc can cause pain in the back, pain in the leg (sciatica), and numbness or paralysis in the legs or even problems with the bladder or bowel.

Treatments include painkillers, drugs to reduce inflammation, corticosteroid injections into the affected area, and physical therapy. If these treatments don't work, or if the symptoms are severe or long lasting, the part of the slipped disc that is pressing on the nerve may be removed, either by open surgery or using less invasive techniques. This is called discectomy.

NICE has looked at using [epiduroscopic lumbar discectomy through the sacral hiatus](#) as another treatment option.

[NHS Choices](#) may be a good place to find out more.

## The procedure

Epiduroscopic lumbar discectomy through the sacral hiatus is usually done with the patient under sedation and local anaesthesia. The aim is to relieve the pain of sciatica by removing the parts of the disc that press against the spinal nerve.

A small cut is made between the buttocks at the base of the spine and a needle is inserted. Using a guidewire and other instruments, a channel is made to the space around the spine containing the spinal nerves. A flexible endoscope is inserted through the channel and positioned so that the surgeon can see the damaged disc and any affected

nerves. A laser is then inserted and used to remove disc tissue.

## Benefits and risks

When NICE looked at the evidence, it decided that more research was needed. The 5 studies that NICE looked at involved a total of 636 patients.

Generally, they showed that patients had less pain and disability when followed up between 3 and 24 months after the procedure.

The studies showed that the risks of epiduroscopic lumbar discectomy through the sacral hiatus for sciatica included:

- mild paralysis in 1 patient, which got better within a month
- foot drop in 2 patients, which got better within 6 months
- increased skin sensitivity in 1 patient
- pins and needles in 15 patients, which disappeared within 6 months
- headaches in 11 patients
- air inside the skull in 1 patient
- infection in 4 patients
- meningitis in 2 patients, which got better with treatment and rest.

If you want to know more about the studies, see the [guidance](#). Ask your health professional to explain anything you don't understand.

## Questions to ask your health professional

- What does the procedure involve?
- What are the benefits I might get?
- How good are my chances of getting those benefits? Could having the procedure make me feel worse?

- Are there alternative procedures?
- What are the risks of the procedure?
- Are the risks minor or serious? How likely are they to happen?
- What care will I need after the procedure?
- What happens if something goes wrong?
- What may happen if I don't have the procedure?

NICE [interventional procedures guidance](#) advises the NHS on the safety of a procedure and how well it works.

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## Accreditation

