

Evidence exists that back fusion surgery does not work

Question: I have two herniated lumbar discs and some doctors said to try conservative treatment and some said to have lumbar-fusion surgery. I am confused and want to avoid surgery if at all possible. What are my alternatives?

Answer: About 125,000 spinal fusions are performed each year. In this kind of operation surgeons take bone (usually from the hip) and use it to fuse together two vertebrae in an attempt to relieve lower-back pain from disc damages.

Patient traffic has quadrupled in a decade, and fusion now costs about \$30,000.

Surgeons who perform these operations rake in a median salary of \$545,000 a year, almost double what most specialists earn, says Medical Group

Management Association. Fusion caught on decades ago as a well-accepted treatment for deformities, fractures and dislocations, but surgeons later expanded it to treat back pain as well.

The evidence that fusion works well for regional back pain is “essentially nonexistent,” says University of North Carolina rheumatologist Nortin Halder. “If this were a pill and I used it, I would probably lose my license and go to jail.”

Alternatives to lumbar disc surgery do exist. Chiropractic, Physical Therapy, Acupuncture, Massage and exercise individually or in combination are sometimes a solution. Decompression tables such as VAX-D Therapy (Vertebral Axial Decompression) are successful in three out of four patients. VAX-D is a non-invasive painless method of giving a series of progressive decompression treatments that create a natural vacuum in the disc, which sucks the disc back

into its center position. When the disc is centralized the bulging, degenerative or herniated material will no longer press on the painful sensitive nerve root.

There is an abundant amount of information about alternatives to back surgery on the Internet. My Websites discuss these options.

Quote of the week: *“The greatest truths are the simplest, and so are the greatest men.”* — J.C. and A.W. Hare