



DO I NEED A SURGICAL REFERRAL?

There are no hard and fast rules for deciding when a visit to a spine surgeon (orthopedic spine surgeon or neurosurgeon) for your back pain is necessary, but here are some general recommendations:

SHOULD I SEE A SURGEON RIGHT AWAY?

Being referred to a spine surgeon too soon may decrease the quality of the care you receive, and may result in an unnecessary operation.

WHAT KIND OF CARE SHOULD I GET BEFORE SEEING A SURGEON?

Care for neck or back problems should focus on physical treatments and exercise therapy, occasionally with emotional support. This should be carried out prior to consideration of referral to a spine surgeon, as it leads to better results.

- For example, if the condition does not improve after 4 to 6 weeks of treatment it is often useful to consult with a specialist, such as a surgeon.

WHEN SHOULD I GO TO THE HOSPITAL?

If certain “Red Flag” symptoms are present, an immediate referral to the hospital is warranted. These include:

- Inability to go to the bathroom or to control the urine.
- Numbness in the groin area.
- Severe muscle weakness in the legs.

WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF BACK SURGERY?

Back surgery is designed to correct anatomical conditions that involve spinal instability or nerve pinching that do not get better with non-surgical care.

IF I AM REFERRED TO A SURGEON, DOES THAT MEAN SURGERY?

- Many back pain patients referred to a spine surgeon do not end up requiring surgery.
- Spine surgeons may suggest further physical treatments and exercise therapy or prescribe injections.

SHOULD I CONSIDER DIFFERENT OPTIONS IF SURGERY IS SUGGESTED?

Yes, consider all options before you agree to back surgery, especially if an operation known as **fusion** is suggested.

- Consider getting a second opinion from a qualified spine specialist.
- Spine surgeons may hold different opinions about when to operate and what type of surgery to perform.