

BACK ON TRACK

IF A BACK INJURY IS AFFECTING YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE, TREAT IT WITH DECOMPRESSIVE LAMINECTOMY. FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE SURGERY HERE.

One of the most common sports injuries involve pain in the back or neck. If you exercise a lot and play sports like golf, tennis and football, you would probably have experienced lower back pain at least once, no matter how fit or healthy you are.

This is because our spine is subject to plenty of strain and undergoes tremendous pressure during strenuous activities, particularly in sports involving repetitive or twisting motions, or heavy weights. That's why it's important to warm up your body and muscles before engaging in any sport activity.

While the majority of back pain can be treated with over-the-counter medicine and physiotherapy, surgery may be needed in chronic cases. Avoiding medical help may lead to more severe injury and prevent you from participating in the sport you love.

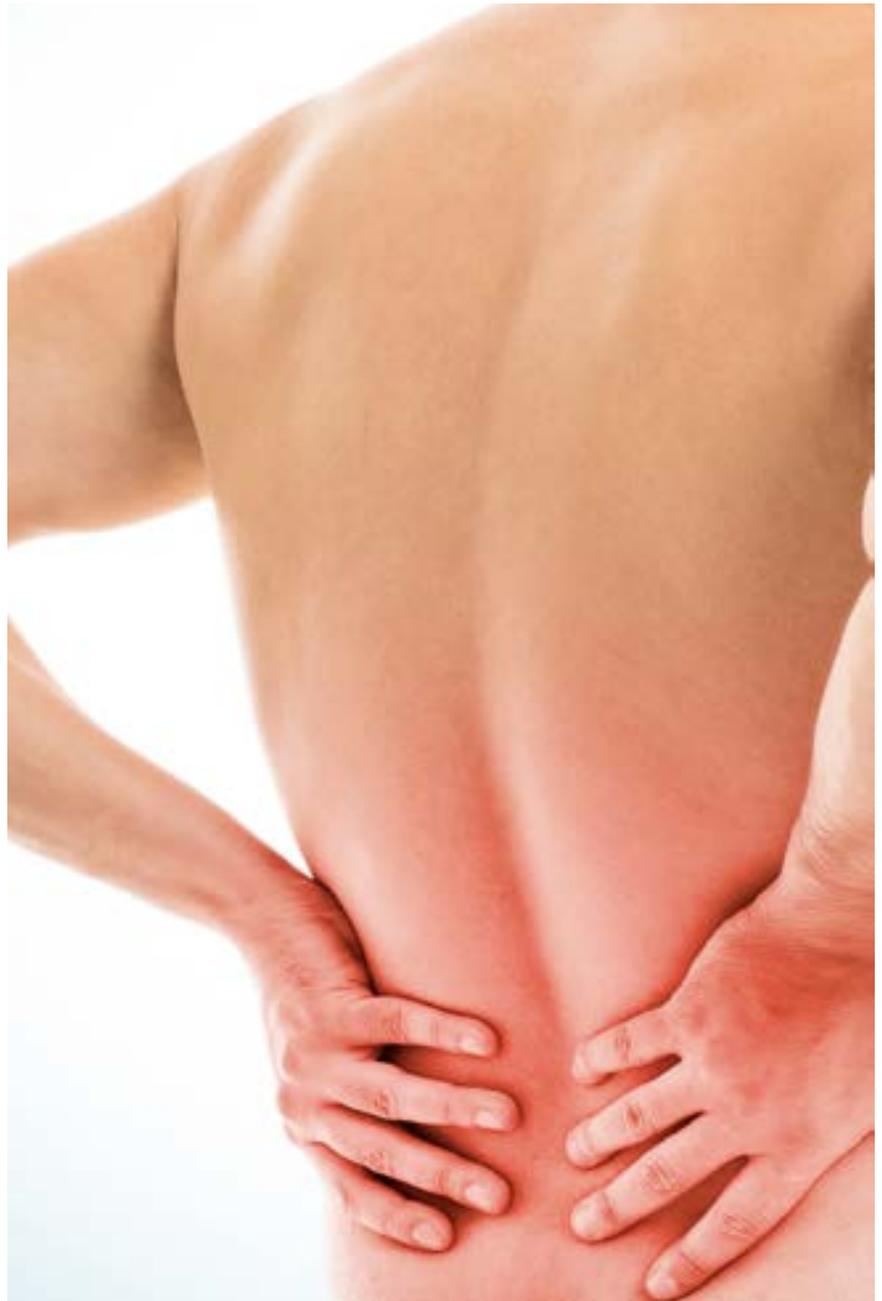
Dr Chua Soo Yong, orthopaedic surgeon at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital, answers some common questions about back injuries and their potential treatments.

■ HOW DO I KNOW IF I NEED SURGERY?

If you do not respond to traditional treatment (including medication or physical therapy), have muscle weakness that makes standing or walking difficult, or experience loss of bowel or bladder control, it's probably time to seek the opinion of an orthopaedic spine specialist at Mount Elizabeth Hospitals, who will make a careful assessment of your back before recommending spinal surgery, such as decompression laminectomy.

■ WHAT IS DECOMPRESSIVE LAMINECTOMY?

This is a type of surgery that relieves pain caused by pressure on the spinal cord or nerves. It involves removing the lamina, a part of the vertebra that covers the spinal canal. This gives the nerve root more space and allows it to heal comfortably.



■ WHAT KIND OF BACK INJURIES CAN IT TREAT?

It is most commonly used to treat lumbar (or lower back) spinal stenosis, which is the narrowing of the spinal canal caused by the overgrowth of bone or other tissue, which compresses the nerve roots. This may then cause back pain and leg pain. Experts feel that the surgery is effective at relieving pain and improving quality of life for those who have severe symptoms.

■ WHAT RESULTS CAN I EXPECT ONCE I AM FULLY RECOVERED?

Most patients have significant improvement in their mobility, and reduced pain and

discomfort. However, symptoms may return after several years, and a second surgery could be required. This usually happens if spinal stenosis develops in a different level and region of the spine, unrelated to the level treated.

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