

TIMOTHY J. JOHANS, M.D.
NEUROLOGICAL SURGEON

6140 W CURTISIAN, SUITE 400
BOISE, IDAHO 83704
TELEPHONE (208) 367-3500
FACSIMILE (208) 367-2968

3875 E OVERLAND ROAD
MERIDIAN, IDAHO 83642
TELEPHONE (208) 367-3500
FACSIMILE (208) 367-2968

ULNAR NERVE DECOMPRESSION

INDICATIONS:

The indications of this operation are progressive numbness in the ulnar nerve distribution, which is generally your little finger and ring finger, as well as weakness in your hand, and aching up and down the arm. When those become progressive, it is a very good idea to move along towards surgery if I have diagnosed this as due to compression of the ulnar nerve at the elbow.

GOALS:

The goal is to get the pressure off the nerve and by doing that, generally speaking, I can greatly diminish the pain in the arm. I can certainly prevent further weakness or numbness in the hand and maximize your potential to get your function back. There are no guarantees that you will get your function back however. Therefore, as soon as you start losing function you should move along with this surgery.

PROCEDURE:

The procedure itself involves a monitored anesthetic wherein you are not intubated. Although you are awake and breathing on your own, you will not remember any of it. I then use local anesthetic and place an approximately 8-10 cm incision along the course of the nerve on the inside of the elbow. I dissect down, find the nerve, and free it up from surrounding bone and ligaments so that when I am finished, there is no pressure on the ulnar nerve in any way. I then close the wound in two or three layers of stitches and generally speaking a plastic surgery final closure.

RISKS:

The risks of this operation include but are not limited to the following:

1. Bleeding. There is a very small risk of bleeding. My average blood loss is approximately one teaspoon. I have never had to give a transfusion in my career for this operation.
2. Infection. This is by far and away the most common complication. This is not because of an infection that occurs during the operation but because it is on the outside of your elbow and is commonly secondarily infected by resting your elbow on countertops and/or hitting it on different things. It is important to be careful with your incision. Keep it clean and dry at all times. My overall infection rate for this surgery is less than 1%.
3. Nerve damage. There is a very small risk of nerve damage which can cause further weakness and numbness in your hand. The odds of that are very low. It is not unusual for people to have a new area of numbness in the forearm if a sensory branch is damaged during the incision. These sensory branches are so small that we cannot see them during the operation. This happens in less than 5% of patient's but I want you to understand that it can occur.

If you want more information on this procedure, please visit my website at www.timjohansmd.com.