

When Facing Spinal Surgery, Raise a Hand and Question It

Endoscopic Spine Surgeon Dr. Kaixuan Liu with Atlantic Spine Center Offers Tips About What Patients Should Ask Their Surgeon Prior to Spine Surgery

WEST ORANGE, NJ, UNITED STATES, November 10, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Being referred for minimally invasive [endoscopic surgery](#)? Do you even know what that is? Don't just sit on your hands. Raise them and start asking questions, advises world-renowned endoscopic spine surgeon [Dr. Kaixuan Liu](#), MD, PhD.

"Endoscopic spine surgery is an advanced, state-of-the-art approach that has revolutionized the treatment of a wide variety of conditions causing back and neck pain. But, despite their clinical successes, endoscopic spinal procedures are not without risks, and results can vary depending on the overall age and condition of the patient and the specific problem being addressed," says Dr. Liu, founder and medical director of the [Atlantic Spine Center](#) and the Advanced Spine Surgery Center in New Jersey and New York.



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Dr. Kaixuan Liu

Patients should not simply make assumptions, he adds.

“The significance of the spine cannot be overstated. It serves as the body's central support structure and protects the spinal cord, which is a key component of a person's central nervous system,” Dr. Liu states. “That's why a patient must be fully informed – and given all options and possibilities -- before agreeing to any procedure affecting the spine.”

He points specifically to a study just recently published (March 2022) in the Journal of Healthcare Engineering. In it,

authors write, “Percutaneous spinal endoscopic technology has obvious advantages in reducing

nerve root injury, dural injury, and surgical area wound complications.” But they add, “For each clinical surgeon, the complications of surgery are a great challenge; so, it is only fully and systematically important to know and grasp the surgical complications.”

Minimally invasive endoscopic surgery involves the surgeon’s use of a tubular instrument – an endoscope – that is equipped with a high-definition camera and light to “visualize” the treatment area. The endoscope is inserted through a tiny incision, creating a working channel through which the physician can then manipulate micro-surgical instruments and correct the spinal problem causing the patient discomfort and pain.

The operation is usually performed on an outpatient basis, and the patient normally leaves the hospital within a few hours following the surgery. Advantages of this type of surgery include quick recovery with minimum pain, less trauma and damage to soft tissues, reduced need for postoperative medications, preservation of spinal mobility, and a high success rate. The procedure is most effectively used for:

- Enlarging the spinal root canal to relieve compression of nerves due to a herniated disc, excessive ligaments, or bone spurs.
- Removing herniated disc material impinging spinal serves and causing debilitating pain or numbness in the legs or arms.
- Deadening nerves that promote ongoing neck and back pain.

“Yet, there are no guarantees. A patient’s back pain might not be entirely eliminated by endoscopic surgery, and an additional, later procedure may be required. In older patients, surgery cannot reverse aging’s effects on the spine and spinal deterioration – no matter how advanced the procedure,” Dr. Liu explains. “As spinal specialists, we must provide patients with realistic expectations of what surgery can – and cannot -- do for them.”

Dr. Liu’s concerns are echoed by investigators in a 2018 edition of the journal *Neurospine*. “Degenerative spine disease, encompassing disc prolapse and stenosis, is a common ailment in old age,” the researcher’s state. “Management of degenerative spine disease in elderly patients with multiple comorbidities is a challenging task.”

Meanwhile, scientists writing in a 2020 issue of the *International Journal of Spine Surgery* note a “high rate of positive outcomes with endoscopic thoracic spine surgery, which reduces tissue dissection, intraoperative blood loss, and epidural fibrosis. However, the technical challenge highlights the importance of further training and innovation in this rapidly evolving field.”

So, what kind of information should a patient – age 20 or age 85 -- obtain when considering back surgery as a treatment option?

“First and foremost, patients need to inquire whether an operation – minimally invasive or not -- will likely ‘fix’ or, at least, relieve their back or neck pain and how many similar procedures has their surgeon already successfully performed,” Dr. Liu notes. “Unless there is a high degree of

probability for a positive outcome, patients should seriously question whether or not to proceed. Spinal surgery always comes with risks – no matter how advanced the procedure.”

Other questions patients are advised to ask pending surgery, Dr. Liu says, include:

- What possibly could go wrong in surgery? Could surgery worsen my problem?
- How difficult will be the recovery period? Will I need assistance at home following my procedure?
- How long will surgery keep me in the hospital?
- Do I have other non-surgical treatment options to consider before agreeing to an operation?
- Would there be any exacerbation of my problem if surgery were delayed? Would my condition only worsen if I avoid surgery?
- Is a minimally invasive endoscopic surgery the optimal approach for treating my issue?
- What lifestyle changes, if any, should I make prior to scheduling surgery?
- Will postsurgical pain management be an issue?
- How will the back/neck surgery affect my daily routine or activities? Will I regain normal functions?

“The bottom line: surgery is your decision to make but be sure it is an informed decision. Always proceed cautiously. You cannot undo a procedure once it has been performed. So, ask now,” Dr. Liu emphasizes.

Kaixuan Liu, MD, PhD, is a board-certified physician who is fellowship-trained in minimally invasive spine surgery. He is the founder of Atlantic Spine Center.

Atlantic Spine Center is a nationally recognized leader for endoscopic spine surgery with several locations in NJ and NYC. www.atlanticspinecenter.com

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