



HealthPartners Designated Medical Spine Centers Network Frequently Asked Questions

General

What is a Designated Medical Spine Center?

A Designated Medical Spine Center is a physician-directed medical practice with one or more Designated Medical Spine Specialists on staff.

What is a Designated Medical Spine Specialist?

A Designated Medical Spine Specialist is a non-surgical clinician with advanced training and expertise in spine care. They're trained in specialties such as physical medicine and rehabilitation, occupational medicine, sports medicine or related fields.

What can a Designated Medical Spine Specialist do for me?

They are specialists in helping people who have chronic low back pain and who may be considering surgery. They perform services such as:

- In-depth evaluation and assessment of your back problems
- Helping you understand your full range of options for managing your back pain, including both surgical and non-surgical options
- Connecting you with resources to help you make decisions, based on your values and preferences, that are right for you

What does "Designated" mean?

To be part of the HealthPartners network, a Medical Spine Center has to request admission and complete a detailed review by HealthPartners. This review examines standards of care and adherence to certain evidence-based guidelines such as those issued by the Institute for Clinical Systems Integration (ICSI).

Why did HealthPartners introduce this approach?

Chronic low back pain is one of the most common reasons that people seek health care. There's a growing body of evidence that many patients with back pain can be treated without surgery. But comparing back pain treatment alternatives can be confusing. This approach designed to help make sure you're well-informed about all of your options so you can make decisions about your care that are right for you.

Getting my evaluation

When would I see a Designated Medical Spine Specialist?

Prior to your first office visit with a spine surgeon (unless you have an emergency – see below). For most people, a visit to a Designated Medical Spine Specialist will be recommended by a primary care doctor.

Do I need a referral to a Designated Medical Spine Center?

No. But typically, your primary care doctor will let you know when you should see one.



How do I find a Designated Medical Spine Center and Specialist?

Visit healthpartners.com and click the “Health & Wellness” tab. There you’ll find more information and a list of Designated Medical Spine Centers and Specialists.

There isn’t a Designated Medical Spine Center in my geographic area. What should I do for my evaluation?

The Designated Medical Spine Center network has been designed to provide broad geographic coverage for HealthPartners members. Please talk with a HealthPartners Member Services representative, who will be happy to assist you in locating the Center most convenient to you.

After my evaluation

Do I need a referral to a Spine Surgeon?

No. You can choose to see a surgeon at any time. Your surgical consult visit will only be covered, however, if you have seen a Designated Medical Spine Specialist first. There is an exception for emergencies.

If I don’t like or agree with the treatment options given to me by the Designated Medical Spine Specialist, do I need to follow them before I see a surgeon?

No. After your Designated Medical Spine Center evaluation, you may choose to select the next steps that you feel are right for you, including having a consult with a spine surgeon if you wish.

If I want to see a surgeon, how soon after the Designated Medical Spine Center visit can I go there?

You can see a spine surgeon up to six months after your evaluation at a Designated Medical Spine Center. If you feel you need to see a surgeon after that, you will need to have an updated Designated Medical Spine Center evaluation.

Out-of-network providers

If I see a clinician who isn’t in the Designated Medical Spine Center network, do I still need to see a Designated Medical Spine Center prior to my first visit with a spine surgeon?

Yes. Medical Spine Centers and Specialists gain “Designated” status only by passing a rigorous review and for demonstrating that they meet HealthPartners requirements.

Special conditions

What if my back pain is severe and I know I need to see a surgeon. Can I bypass the Designated Medical Spine Center?

Yes. Your primary care physician can help determine whether you have symptoms (like increasing weakness or trouble urinating) that require emergency evaluation by a surgeon. In that case, you may be referred directly to the surgeon.



I've already had a back surgery. Am I still required to go to a Designated Medical Spine Center?

If you're seeing a surgeon for follow-up visits for a surgery performed within the last six months, no. If you've had surgery in the past and are having chronic back pain, you should discuss your symptoms with your primary care doctor and determine if a visit to a Designated Medical Spine Center is best for you.

Other questions

How much does a Designated Medical Spine Center visit cost?

The cost of the visit will vary by provider. For many patients, being aware of all of your options may result in less expensive and invasive options than surgery, which could easily offset the costs of the visit.

I have a High Deductible Health Plan. Why should I pay for a Designated Medical Spine Center visit when I am sure that I should see a surgeon?

There are many options for treating chronic back pain. There is a growing body of evidence that many patients, even those who might be considered surgical candidates, can be treated without surgery. The visit will ensure that you know all of your options, which may include less expensive and invasive options to surgery.

How is this different from the low back pain program I am participating in or that I was sent information for?

HealthPartners has many options available to help you evaluate your low back pain back treatment options. This approach is designed especially for chronic low back pain patients who may be considering or being asked to consider surgery.