

Herniated Discs in the Lumbar Spine

July 2017

Before explaining what a herniated disc is, we'd like to give you a quick lesson in anatomy. Your spine is held together by 24 bones, called vertebrae. There are five vertebrae that meld the lower back and this area is called the lumbar spine. Between 60-80 percent of people will experience low back pain at some point in their lives, whether it is caused by strenuous daily activities or a sudden injury. A high percentage of people, however, will have low back pain that is caused by a herniated disc. Also referred to as a slipped disc, or a ruptured disc, a disc will begin to herniate when its jelly-like nucleus pushes against its outer ring due to wear and tear or sudden injury. This causes pressure against the outer ring that leads to pain in the lumbar spine. Lumbar herniated discs often affect people who are 35 to 50 years of age.

Causes

In several cases, a lumbar herniated disc will develop with age as the discs begin to weaken. In addition to the depletion that comes with getting older, other factors can increase the odds of a herniated disc such as:

- **A sedentary lifestyle** – Sitting for extended periods of time puts extra pressure on the back and spine, thus increasing your chance of developing a herniated disc.
- **Weight** – When the body experiences weight gain, this extra weight puts added stress on the discs in your lower back.
- **Improper lifting** – You should always lift with your legs and never your back. Using back muscles to lift heavy objects, instead of your legs can cause a disc to slip out of place.
- **Genetics** – A family history of a disc herniation can be passed on through genetics.
- **Injury** – Injuries that result in a forceful blow to the spine can cause immediate herniation.

Symptoms

Symptoms of a herniated disc may vary depending on the location. Low back pain is the primary symptom associated with a herniated disc in the lumbar spine, but sometimes, a herniated disc may not be the cause. You should visit your chiropractor immediately to receive a proper diagnosis if you are experiencing the following:

- Leg/or foot pain (sciatica)
- Numbness or a tingling sensation in the low back, leg, or foot
- Weakness in the leg or foot

- Pain associated with bending forward or twisting

It's important to know that not all patients will experience pain as a spinal disc degenerates. To determine whether or not you have a disk that is herniated, you will need to visit your doctor for a spinal examination.

Non-Surgical Treatment Options

Non-invasive treatment options will always be explored first before discussing surgical options. Non-surgical treatment options may include:

- Ice application or cold therapy – application of ice to an inflamed area may be helpful in decreasing the inflammation and muscle spasms associated with a lumbar herniated disc.
- Pain medication – Depending on the chiropractor, pain medications may be administered to treat pain and inflammation.
- Epidural steroid injection – Depending on the level of pain the patient is in or if they feel a constant tingling sensation in the leg, a steroid injection will be administered to reduce inflammation near the affected nerves in the lumbar spine.
- Physical therapy – Physical therapy includes a combination of treatments to decrease pain and increase flexibility. Your doctor and physical therapist will develop an individualized treatment plan tailored to your needs.