Annular Tearing

Annular Tearing (Internal Disc Disruption)

**Situation:** Annular Tearing occurs when there is internal damage to the discs in your back. The discs—technically referred to as intervertebral discs—are part of a strong but elastic suspension system that sits between the vertebrae of the spinal column. These joints allow your body to twist and bend. The intervertebral discs are composed of two basic structures, the inner viscous *nucleus pulposus* and the durable outer portion called the *annulus fibrosis*. When these two layers break down, the result is disc herniation.

**Causes:** Annular tears—sometimes referred to as *internal disc disruption*—are often the first step to a disc herniation. Annular tearing begins when small radial slits occur, allowing the viscous nuclear material to leak to the outer third of the disc, irritating sensitive nerve endings. Annular tearing can occur throughout life resulting in episodic back pain. If left unchecked, the damage and deformation of the disc’s annular fibers can produce a complete disc herniation. Nerve root compression does not have to take place for pain or radiating pain to occur. Annular tears are seen on MRI. Age, trauma, work, diet, social activities, weight and genetics can all play a role in causing an annular tear.

**Symptoms:** Symptoms can start with general stiffness, tightness and occasional sharp pain with movement. Over time, symptoms can progress to achy pain that radiates in nature, as well as muscle spasms and altered posture.

**Treatment:** Treatments options can include chiropractic care, acupuncture, physical therapy, and massage therapy. The chiropractor will help determine what type of treatments and modalities are appropriate for you. Upon examination the doctor may order special testing such as an MRI. A concurrent referral may be placed to your medical doctor for specific medications to help make you comfortable.