

Lumbar Disc Herniation

Herniated Disc (lumbar)

Situation:

Intervertebral discs act as a strong yet elastic suspension system between each of the vertebrae of the spinal column. These joints, along with others, allow for very dynamic movements such as twisting and bending. Discs are composed of two basic structures, the inner gelatinous layer called the nucleus pulposus and the durable outer disc wall called the annulus fibrosis. The breakdown of these two layers leads to a disc herniation.

Causes:

A herniation begins with small tears that create a fragile site within the disc wall. This weakness allows the material of the nucleus to leak into the disc wall where sensitive nerve receptors are concentrated. The leaking can cause localized back pain and muscle stiffness. If enough material leaks out a deformation of the disc can occur causing the compression of spinal nerves or the spinal cord. This pressure can cause an array of symptoms including radiating pain, tingling and loss of function on one or both sides of the body.

The herniation of an intervertebral disc can happen suddenly and without warning causing excruciating pain and loss of function to the body. Age, social activities, work, diet, weight, genetics and trauma can all factor into the development of disc herniations.

Symptoms:

Symptoms can start with general stiffness, tightness and occasional sharp pain with movement. Over time, symptoms can progress to shooting pain in the buttocks, thighs and legs, constant achy pain, muscle spasms and altered posture. In severe cases symptoms can include muscle weakness, loss of strength in the hips, thighs, legs and feet. You may also experience an agonizing electrical type pain, decreased reflexes, difficulty walking, and loss of bowel and bladder control.

Treatment:

Treatment options can include chiropractic care, acupuncture, physical therapy, and massage therapy. Your chiropractor will help determine which treatments and modalities are appropriate for your specific condition. The doctor might also order special testing such as an MRI or make a referral to your medical doctor for specific medications to help make you comfortable. In non-responsive or severe cases surgery may be needed.