

Diagnosis of Back Problems

Welcome to MidJersey Orthopedics. After discussing your symptoms with Dr. Collalto, the diagnosis of your back problems will probably begin with regular x-rays. Other procedures which may be performed are MRI scans and CAT scans. Sometimes discography is used to pinpoint ruptures when more than one may be suspected. In discography, Dr. Collalto would inject a dye into a disk, and the dye will clearly show the rupture in an x-ray.

Closed Procedures

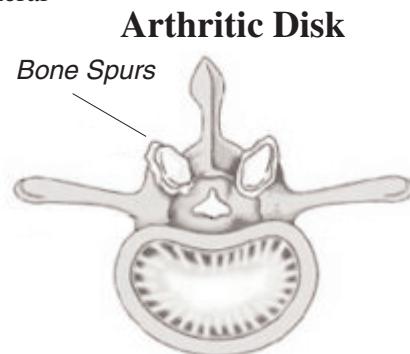
There are two basic surgical procedures: open and closed. Closed procedures are used when no cutting is required. In a closed procedure, you will only need a local anesthesia, and you can be discharged the same day you have the surgery.

Some closed procedures in back surgery include shrinking of a *disk rupture* by injecting a drug called Chymopapaine or by suction or aspiration of the disk. The surgeon may even elect to shrink the disk rupture by using a laser without having to use an open procedure.

Open Procedures

An open procedure occurs when the surgeon finds he needs to create an incision to perform more delicate work on your back. If you are to undergo an open procedure, then you will be given a general anesthesia.

You will be entirely sedated and unaware of the operation.



Arthritic Disk

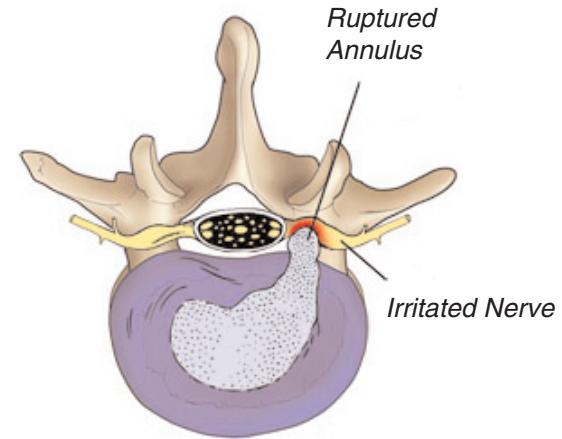
Hospitalization can be from one to seven days depending on the procedure. Open surgical procedures may require only a small incision. *Microdiscectomy* is a relatively new procedure where the surgeon works under magnification to enlarge his view of the operating site. This greatly improves his ability to operate precisely without a large incision.

In a *laminectomy* the surgeon is trying to widen the space through which the nerves in the spine pass. The nerves may be irritated and cramped by the growth of bone spurs in the spine. If you are diagnosed with *spinal stenosis*, then you may need a laminectomy. This procedure has been performed for many years, and it is considered a standard back surgery procedure.

Sometimes a patient's spine has degenerative conditions which make the spine unstable (such as *arthritis* or *stress fractures*). These conditions are usually treated with a third procedure called *fusion*. Fusion allows the surgeon to stabilize the back, and it may be combined with a laminectomy if there is significant back pain as well.

Still experimental is a procedure called disk replacement. This procedure has been used successfully with hip and knee joints, but remains experimental in the area of disk replacement.

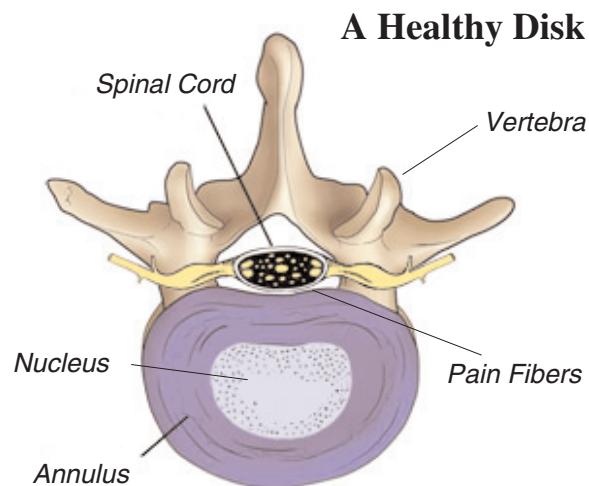
Ruptured Disk



Because open procedures require an incision, a small amount of blood may be lost during the operation. This amount is usually negligible, but those undergoing fusion may need to donate blood before surgery. Your surgeon will discuss this possibility with you.

Recovery from Back Surgery

The time required for full recovery is, of course, based on many factors. One important factor is the kind of activity the patient needs to perform. For example, construction workers may need several months to return to pre-operation ability after a simple procedure such as disk surgery. However, the person whose physical activity is quite low may find he or she has normal physical ability after a much shorter time.



The annulus and nucleus together make up the disk.

