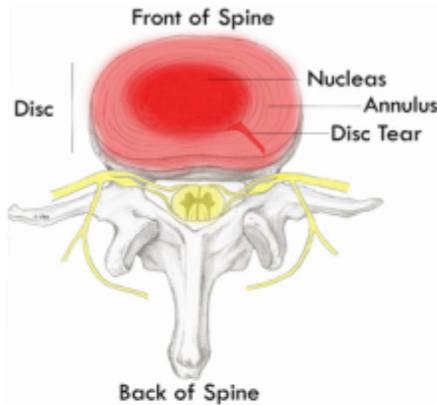


DISCOGRAPHY

For Diagnosing Disc Pain

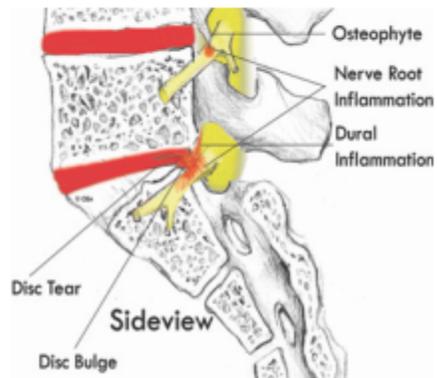


Discography is a procedure for diagnosing painful tears in intervertebral discs. This information sheet will explain what it is. Your doctor can explain if it is for you.

What are intervertebral discs?

Intervertebral discs are found between the vertebrae (the bones) of the spine. These soft discs cushion the vertebrae, hold them together, and control motion. They are located in the neck, upper back and lower back.

Each disc has two parts. The inner part is called the nucleus, and the outer part is called the annulus. The annulus has nerve endings that are sensitive to pain.



What causes pain in a disc?

If a disc tears, chemicals inside the nucleus may leak out. This can inflame the nerves in the outer part of the disc, the annulus, and cause pain. Nerve roots and the protective covering of the spinal cord (called the dura) are also sensitive to these chemicals.

When the nerve roots or dura in the neck are affected, it causes neck and arm pain. In the upper back area, it causes pain in the upper back or chest. In the low back, it causes low back and/or leg pain.

An untreated disc tear may also cause a disc to bulge. This can further inflame or compress the nerve roots and cause even more pain. This means early diagnosis of disc tears is important.

How do I know if I have disc pain?

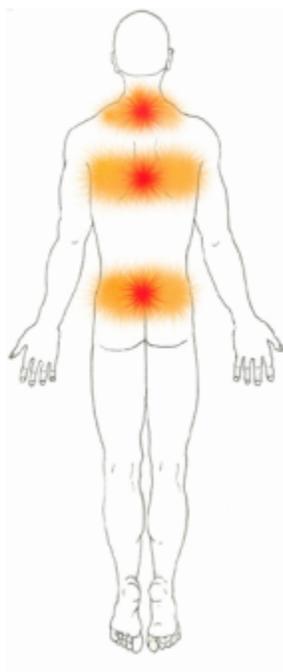
If you have pain in your neck, arms, chest, upper or lower back, or legs, and it has not improved with treatment, you may have disc pain.

Common tests such as MRIs can show disc bulges and nerve root compression, but may miss tears or leaks in discs. Discography is the best way to diagnose torn discs.

What is a discography?

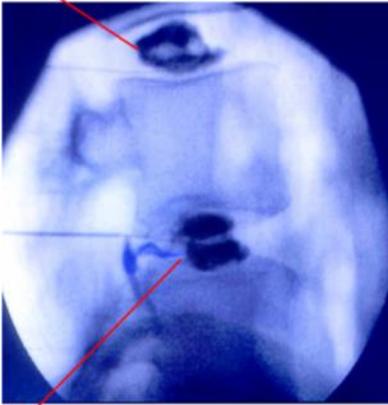
Discography is a procedure that helps your doctor find disc tears that may be causing your pain.

During discography, a thin needle is inserted into the center of a disc. Fluid is then injected, creating a small pressure. A dye in the fluid will outline any tears in the disc. This is often done to several discs to find the specific disc or discs that are causing your pain.



For Diagnosing Disc Pain

X Ray Side View
Disc with No Tear

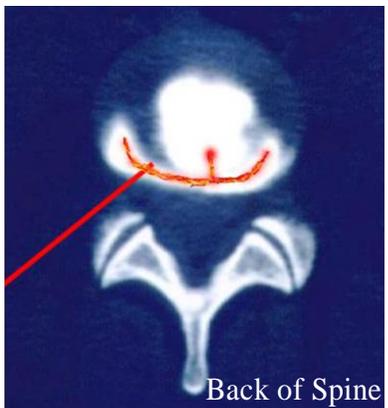


Torn Disc With Dye Leaking Out

CT Scan



Dye Leak From Disc Tear



Close Up With
Simulated Dye Leak

What happens during discography?

Discography may start with an IV (medicine given intravenously) to help you relax and put you into a twilight sleep. A local anesthetic (numbing medicine) will be used to numb your skin.

The doctor will then insert a thin needle directly into a disc. Fluoroscopy, a type of x-ray, will be used to ensure the safe and proper position of the needle. A dye will be injected to outline the tear.

It is important to describe any pain you feel to your doctor. During discography, a healthy disc will not cause your usual pain but a torn disc will. If you feel a different pain or soreness, be sure to explain that it hurts but it's not your usual pain. This will help the doctor determine which discs are torn and causing your pain.

What happens after discography?

You will be monitored for at least 30 minutes after the procedure. When you are ready to leave, the clinic will give you discharge instructions. You may be sent for a CT (cat) scan to get an image of your discs.

You may feel increased pain in your back after discography. This indicates your doctor has found the source of your pain.

You can usually return to work a day or two after discography, but always check with your doctor.

What happens next?

You will have a follow-up appointment with your doctor to discuss the results of the discography. Your doctor will then recommend the best treatment for you based on the results.

This pamphlet is for general education only. Specific questions or concerns should always be directed to your doctor. Your doctor can explain possible risks or side effects.



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