

What Is a Herniated Disc?

Many patients with back pain, leg pain, or weakness of the lower extremity muscles are diagnosed with a herniated disc. When a disc herniation occurs, the cushion that sits between the spinal vertebrae is pushed outside its normal position. A herniated disc would not be a problem if it weren't for the spinal nerves that are very close to the edge of these spinal discs.

What Is the Spinal Disc?

The spinal disc is a soft cushion that sits between each vertebrae of the spine. In a young individual, the disc is soft and elastic. However, like so many other structures in the body, the disc gradually loses its elasticity and is more vulnerable to injury. In fact, even in individuals as young as 30, MRIs show evidence of disc deterioration in about 30 percent of people.

What Happens When a Disc Herniates?

As the spinal disc becomes less elastic, it can rupture. When the disc ruptures, a portion of it pushes outside its normal boundary—this is called a herniated disc. When a herniated disc bulges out from between the vertebrae, the spinal nerves and spinal cord can become pinched. There is normally a little extra space around the spinal cord and spinal nerves. However, if enough of the herniated disc is pushed out of place, these structures may be compressed.

What Causes a Herniated Disc?

A herniated disc may occur suddenly in an event such as a fall or an accident, or may occur gradually with repetitive straining of the spine. Often people who experience a herniated disc already have spinal stenosis, a problem that causes narrowing of the space around the spinal cord and spinal nerves.

What Are the Symptoms of a Herniated Disc?

When the spinal cord or spinal nerves become compressed, they don't work properly. This means that abnormal signals may get passed from the compressed nerves or that signals may not get passed at all. Common symptoms of a herniated disc include the following:

- **Electrical-Shock-Like Pain**
Pressure on the nerves can cause pain to travel down the arms or legs, depending on the location of the herniated disc. This pain feels like an electrical shock.
- **Tingling and Numbness**
Patients often have abnormal sensations such as tingling, numbness, or “pins and needles.” These symptoms may be experienced in the same region as painful electric-shock sensations.
- **Muscle Weakness**
Because of the nerve irritation, signals from the brain may be interrupted causing muscle weakness. Nerve irritation can also be tested by examining reflexes.
- **Bowel or Bladder Problems**
Bowel and bladder problems are important because they may be a signs of a more serious condition that should be evaluated immediately.

Our office focuses on the conservative treatment of herniated discs. We have specialized equipment and procedures that we utilize to safely and painlessly treat herniated discs. If you or someone you know is suffering from a herniated disc and have not found the relief for which you are looking, please contact our office. We may be able to help you.

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