

## DISC HERNIATION TREATMENT

80% to 90% of disc herniations will heal without surgery in 3-4 months. A disc herniation is a permanent injury to the disc and will usually result in some chronic, recurring pain in the neck or back. The old adage of “once a backache, always a backache” is probably true.

Most disc herniations will respond to non-operative care, i.e. non-surgical care. In years past the treatment of choice was bedrest and traction. Today, the treatment is focused on early mobilization after 24-48 hours of bed rest-this means a return to regular activities with modifications as soon as possible. Walking is felt to help the healing process and keep the muscles strong that support and protect the spine. Along with early activity, over the counter medications such as aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen and acetaminophen [Tylenol] help relieve the inflammation and pain. If the pain persists for more than 7-10 days, then I suggest you call your primary care physician. Your physician will then provide you with further treatment or refer you to an orthopedic specialist for evaluation. Orthopedic treatment for neck and back problems will include an x-ray of your spine along with further medications to include cortisone, muscle relaxers and a pain reliever. Physical therapy will also be suggested. Other options for treatment include Pilates/yoga, chiropractic care or a self-directed exercise program at a fitness center with aerobic and trunk strengthening exercises.

For more serious disc herniations, more aggressive non-operative care may be needed. Your orthopedic treating physician may then refer you to an orthopedic or neurosurgical spine specialist. He or she might prescribe cortisone injections into the inflamed areas of the spine or epidural cortisone injections into the spinal canal to decrease inflammation around the disc and nerves. The epidural injections are usually done by the anesthesiologists at the hospital or in an outpatient surgery suite by a pain management physician.

If the pain does not respond to the above measures, hospitalization for intravenous cortisone and pain control may be suggested. The diagnostic studies such as MRI or CT/Myelogram along with your history and physical exam will usually dictate which course of treatment will be the most successful.

In my practice as THE DISC DOCTOR, surgery is the last option for treating disc herniations. Occasionally a disc herniation will be massive and cause immediate nerve damage with severe spinal and nerve pain. In these instances surgery becomes more of an emergency and should be performed early before permanent nerve damage can occur. Again, history, physical exam and diagnostic studies will guide your treating physician to the proper course of treatment for you.

The surgery available for disc herniations has improved over the last 20 years. Using an operating microscope to magnify and shine an intense light into the surgical site has enabled me to perform most disc surgery through a 1 inch incision. This less invasive surgery also allows me to do this operation on a day surgery basis - no overnight stay in the hospital! Less invasive surgery on the spine also promotes faster healing, less pain and rapid return to work. Microscopic spine surgery is my specialty as the DISC DOCTOR. With proper patient selection for this type surgery, a 95% good to excellent result should ensue. The above discussion pertains to lower back and some neck surgeries. In the neck, disc surgery usually requires a bone graft to be placed between the vertebrae where the disc is removed. These patients will spend one night in the hospital after surgery and go home wearing a neck brace or support.

Chronic disabling spinal pain with or without nerve involvement is another story. This condition is not my specialty. The Shreveport/Bossier City area is fortunate to have two spine institutes devoted to offering the latest techniques and technology available. Spinal fusion and disc replacement surgery is available by very talented fellowship trained spine surgeons in our area.

Pain management physicians with advanced training in spinal care are also present here in Shreveport and Bossier City. New techniques for treating chronic pain are being introduced.

Alternative medicine is another area for the treatment of chronic neck and back problem. Acupuncture, massage, biofeedback and psychological support are just a few of these alternative medicine techniques.

In closing my byline as THE DISC DOCTOR I would like to say how much I have enjoyed writing the three articles about disc problems. I hope the information is helpful for your spinal care and protection. Just remember that a healthy neck and back requires regular exercise to keep the muscular support system for the spine as strong and fit as possible. Please stay FIT and STRONG.