



Newsletter

Low Back Pain and Herniated Discs

Greater than 75% of the population of the United States will suffer at least temporary disability from low back pain or sciatica. It is one of the most common complaints causing patients to visit their family physicians. The disc is made of 2 parts, an inner gelatin like nucleus surrounded by an outer part made of cartilage. The disc acts as a cushion between the bones of the spine and appears to counteract the compressive forces of weight bearing on the lower spine. Disc degeneration begins at an early age and is a normal part of the aging process. The nucleus portion of the disc loses its fluidity and becomes more fibrous. Small tears in the outside of the disc allow the central portion to leak out and compress a nearby nerve that goes to the leg. These nerves come together to form the sciatic nerve which, when compressed, causes leg pain. Physical stresses and trauma may contribute to the degenerative process of the disc.

Diagnosis may be made on the basis of patient history and physical exam.



Normal lumbar vertebrae and discs.

Certain tests may be ordered including X-rays, electrical studies of the nerves and MRI of the spine.

Treatment is generally conservative at first, with rest, analgesics and muscle relaxants

being the mainstay. Occasionally, physical therapy will be ordered. Surgery is reserved for patients who do not improve and have a visible lesion on X-rays or MRI. The vast majority of patients undergoing lumbar disc surgery show significant improvement in symptoms and return to their normal activities. Most require only small operations and fusions of the spine are not usually needed. Not all leg pain is caused by a herniated disc, however. We encourage you to ask questions so the best diagnosis and treatment plan may be implemented.

Procedures Performed by James W. Melisi, MD, FACS, PLLC

Spinal Procedures:

- Lumbar, thoracic and cervical disc herniation surgery
- Complex spinal fusion for trauma, instability, spondylolisthesis
- Procedures for spinal stenosis, spinal cord compression, tumors

Intracranial Procedures:

- Benign and malignant tumors of the brain
- Stereotactic brain biopsy
- Pituitary tumors
- Surgical treatment for Trigeminal Neuralgia
- Skull base surgery
- Neurovascular disease (AVM, aneurysms of the brain)

Peripheral Neuropathy:

- Surgery for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and ulnar neuropathy

Hospital Affiliations:

Active Staff:

Inova Fairfax Hospital
Inova Fair Oaks Hospital
Columbia Reston Hospital
Arlington Hospital

Courtesy Privileges:

London Hospital

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