

About Herniated Discs

Spine Anatomy

The bones that make up your spine (vertebrae) are separated by small, spongy discs.

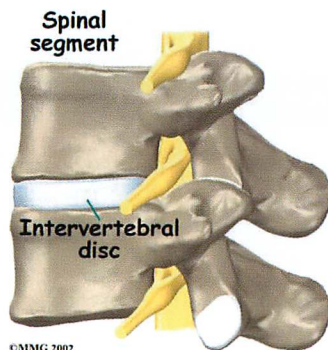
- When the discs are healthy, they act as shock absorbers and keep the spine flexible.
- When discs are damaged, they may bulge or break open.

What Causes Herniated Discs?

A herniated disc may be caused from wear and tear on the disc over time.

- As you age, your discs dry out and become less flexible.
- Poor posture places abnormal stresses on the spine which in time could result in a herniated disc.
- Repetitive motions performed over a long period of time such as bending forward could eventually result in a herniated disc.

A herniated disc may also result from a direct injury to the spine.



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Symptoms

Herniated discs cause variable symptoms depending on the level of the spine at which the herniation occurs and the severity of the herniation.

- Herniated discs in the neck result in symptoms in the neck and sometimes down the arm, which can extend all the way into the hand
- Herniated discs in the lower back result in symptoms in the back and sometimes down the leg, which can extend all the way into the foot

Common symptoms of herniated discs include the following:

- Pain, numbness, and/or weakness in the area of the body where the nerve travels
 - Pain that travels down the arm or leg is described as sharp, shooting, burning, etc.
 - You start to notice patterns of positions that make your symptoms worse and those that alleviate your symptoms (for example, standing makes you feel better, sitting down makes you feel worse)

How Physical Therapy Can Help

Physical Therapy can help patients with herniated discs in a number of ways.

- Modalities (heat/ice, electric stimulation, ultrasound) to decrease pain/inflammation and promote healing
- Therapeutic exercises to strengthen trunk musculature
- Manual techniques to improve spinal range of motion (ROM)
- Personalized home exercise program to maintain strength/flexibility outside of therapy
- Education on body mechanics, technique modifications to prevent future recurrence

With physical therapy, many patients gain relief from their herniated disc symptoms and are able to return to full activity with improved strength and flexibility.

