

## **Disc Herniation Q & A**

### What is a herniated disc?

Between the vertebrae in the spine are fluid-filled cushions called intervertebral discs. A herniated disc occurs when the nucleus of one of these cushions bulges out. This bulging can compress nerves in your spine and throw off your alignment.

A herniated disc can be the result of normal wear-and-tear on our bodies that happens as we age. However, an injury (such as a car accident or trauma) can also cause a herniated disc. Improperly lifting heavy objects is another common cause.

You may be at an increased risk of a herniated disc if others in your family have experienced this condition. Other risk factors include being overweight, smoking, or working in an occupation that requires frequent and repeated lifting or bending.

### What are the symptoms of a herniated disc?

Pain is the most common symptom of a herniated disc, but the location of your pain depends on which disk is herniated. If you have pain in the buttocks, thighs, or calves, you may have a herniated disc in your lower back.

A herniated disc in the neck can result in shooting pain in the arms and shoulders. You may also experience tingling, numbness, or weakness in these areas.

It's also possible to have a herniated disc without symptoms. However, if you think you may have a herniated disc, you should seek a medical evaluation. An untreated herniated disc can cause nerve damage.

### How can a herniated disc be treated?

Treatment for a herniated disc varies depending on where the ruptured disc is, as well as health and lifestyle factors. Our doctors have found that many patients with herniated discs experience pain relief from minimally invasive epidural anesthetics.

This type of treatment uses an injection to inhibit the release of inflammatory molecules in the body. The goal with any herniated disc treatment is to reduce pain and regain overall quality of life.

### What is causing my severe neck pain?

A herniated disc in your cervical spine, or the part of your spine associated with your neck, can cause severe neck and shoulder pain. While a conservative approach is usually best initially, our team may recommend anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF). If you experience extreme pain and have symptoms of spinal cord compression caused by a herniated disc in the cervical spine, ACDF may be the right option for you.

Our expert team begins the ACDF procedure by making a small incision on your throat. Counterintuitively, this is the most effective way for them to access your spine. The team will then remove the herniated disk and replace it with a bone graft, which will decompress the spine and allow the vertebrae to fuse.

After your procedure, the physician will monitor your healing process with X-rays and a follow-up appointment. Once he is confident that the fusion is stable, you may start pursuing normal activities.