

# LOW BACK HERNIATED DISC

## ◆ What is it?

Sudden or gradual break in the spinal disc. The disc functions like a cushion between the bony vertebrae (bony spinal column). The jellylike contents of the disk then protrude and may push on the spinal cord or nerves coming from the spinal cord, causing symptoms into the legs (sciatica).

## ◆ Signs and Symptoms of this Condition

- Pain in the back that usually affects one side, is worse with movement, and may be worse with sneezing, coughing, or straining.
- Muscle spasms of the muscles in the back.
- Pain, numbness, or weakness affecting one leg.
- If chronic, wasting of the affected leg muscles.

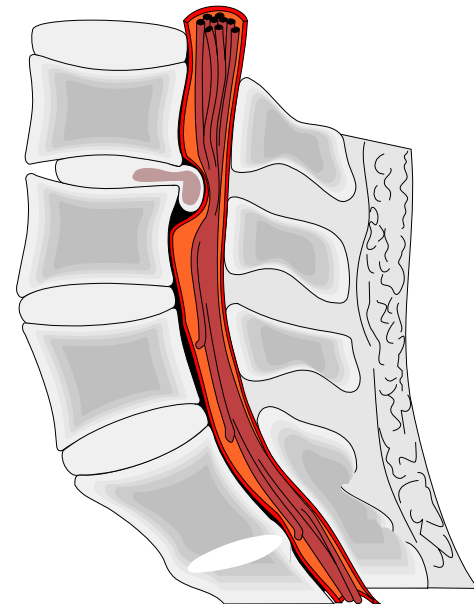
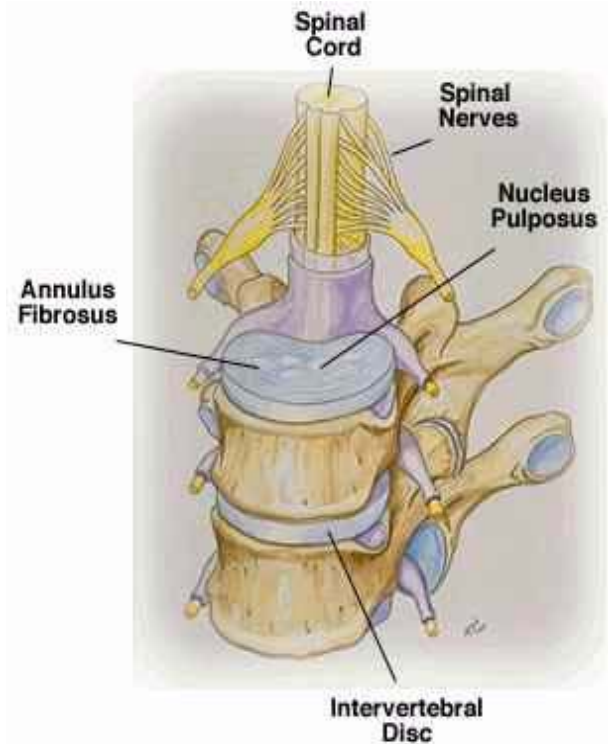
## ◆ Causes

- Usually develops over time from poor posture, improper lifting, or being overweight. Sudden symptoms can occur after performing an activity that causes further injury or serves as the “straw that broke the camel’s back”.

## ◆ What Can I do to prevent a Low Back Herniated Disc?

- Use proper body mechanics when sitting or lifting.
- Appropriately warm-up and stretching before physical activity or sports.
- Maintain appropriate conditioning:
  - Cardiovascular fitness
  - Back and hamstring flexibility
  - Muscle strength and endurance
- Maintain ideal body weight.
- If previously injured, avoid sit-ups and leg lifts/flutter kicks or vigorous physical activity that requires twisting of the body under uncontrollable conditions.

## ◆ Prognosis



- This condition can resolve in 6 weeks with appropriate conservative treatment. Patients not responding to conservative management may require an epidural steroid injection, and some patients may require surgery.

#### ◆ Treatment

- Rest, Ice, and medications (anti-inflammatory medication such as aspirin, ibuprofen, etc and/or muscle relaxants prescribed by your physician if indicated) to relieve pain.
- After 48-72 hours you may change to using heat (hot shower on the low back, hot pack, etc.).
- Avoid prolonged bed rest (no more than 1-2 days at the most in severe acute injuries). Prolonged bed rest can lead to deconditioning and weakening of important muscle groups that support and stabilize your back.
- A back brace / lumbar corset is often helpful in reducing symptoms due to a bulging or herniated disc in the low back.
- Back extension exercises **AS LONG AS IT REDUCES THE SYMPTOMS IN YOUR LEG WHEN THESE SYMPTOMS ARE PRESENT** (See below – resting up on your elbows on your stomach for 3-5 minutes at a time several times per day, pressing your upper body upward so that your shoulders come up but your waist stays on the ground 10-15 repetitions per hour, or standing with your hands on your hips and bending backwards 10-15 repetitions per hour). **See Below**
- Progress into back and abdominal strengthening exercises (**See Below**) as symptoms resolve. These should be performed long-term to help protect your back and reduce the chance of recurrent injuries.
- **AVOID** exercises such as sit-ups, leg lifts/flutter kicks, and running during your recovery.
- Perform low impact aerobic training to maintain cardiovascular fitness, promote healing, and reduce pain (bike, swim, elliptical trainer, ski machine, etc.). These should be performed with minimal to no pain.

