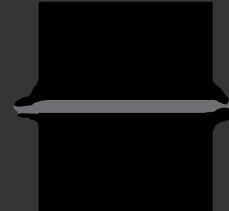
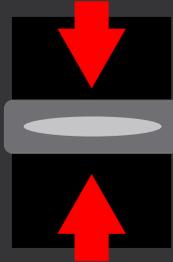


What Type of Low Back Disc Problem Do You Have?

What does the disc do?

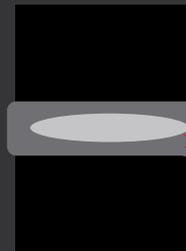
The disc acts as a natural shock absorber and helps to control motion of the spine.



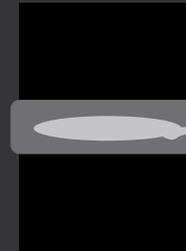
Collapsed Disc

Collapsed discs are also called degenerative or the diagnosis is termed DDD (Degenerative Disc Disease). The cells inside the disc that normally produce chemicals that hold onto water and give the disc its shock absorber properties, die off leading to the water escaping and the disc collapsing. These discs are quite sloppy in their movement and are by definition unstable, causing large bone spurs to form which is the body's attempt at stabilizing the area. These spurs can press on spinal nerves. The reduced disc height also puts pressure on the facet joints in the back of the spine (see below), leading to more wear and tear arthritis in those joints. Spinal stenosis (arthritis leading to pressure on the nerves in the spinal canal) is more common with DDD.

A bulging disc is also called a disc protrusion or bulge. This means that the outer covering of the disc (annulus) is partially torn or damaged and the inner gel is causing the area to bulge. This can put pressure on a spinal nerve and cause numbness and tingling (sciatica).



Bulging Disc

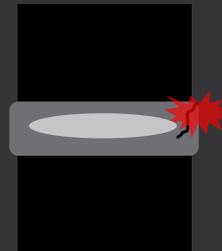


Herniated Disc

A herniated disc is also called a disc extrusion, slipped disc, sequestration, or "HNP" (Herniated Nucleus Pulposus). This means that the outer covering of the disc (annulus) is completely torn or damaged and the inner gel squirts out. This can put pressure on a spinal nerve or cause severe swelling and lead to numbness and tingling (sciatica).

Torn and Painful Disc

Disc tears are also called annular tears or HIZs (High Intensity Zones) on MRI images. A patient with a painful and torn disc has "disogenic pain". The outer covering of the disc can be torn due to injury and painful nerves can grow into the area, leading to low back pain, usually with sitting or activity. In addition, the tear in the disc may lead to noxious chemicals escaping and irritating the spinal nerve, which can lead to sciatica.



Where does the disc fit into the spine?

The disc sits between the spinal bones (vertebrae) in the front part of the spine. In the back part are the facet joints (two at each level). This is important, because lost disc height places more pressure on the facet joints (see DDD above).

