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A Patients Guide To: DISCOGRAPHY

Discography

What are the discs?

The discs are soft, cushion-like pads which separate the hard vertebral bones of the spine. A disc may be painful when it bulges, herniates, tears, or degenerates and may cause pain the neck, mid-back, low back and arms, chest wall, abdomen, or legs. Other structures in the spine may also cause similar pain such as the muscles, joints, and nerves. Before performing discography, it has usually been determined that these other structures are not the sole source of pain in a patient (through history and physical examination, review of x-rays, CTs, MRIs and/or diagnostic injection procedures such as facet injections, sacroiliac joint injections, and/or nerve root blocks).

What is discography and why is it helpful?

Discography confirms or denies the disc(s) as the source of pain. Utilizing x-ray guidance, this procedure involves the placement of a needle into the discs along with a contrast dye. CTs and MRI scans only demonstrate anatomy and cannot absolutely prove a patient's pain source. In many instances, the discs may be abnormal on MRI or CT scans but not a source of pain. Only discography can tell if the disc(s) themselves are a source of pain. Therefore, discography is done to identify painful disc(s) and help the surgeon plan the correct surgery or avoid surgery that may not be beneficial. Discography is usually done only if a patient's pain is significant enough for them to consider surgery.

Lumbar Discography

The test will determine which disc, if any, is causing your pain. There are many causes of low back pain, which can also be related to the lumbar spine. This test will help the Physician find the cause of the specific pain. This is the only test known to tell if the pain is caused by disc abnormalities. By identifying which disc or discs are causing the pain, the Physician can more accurately prescribe treatment or surgery. A local anesthetic numbs the skin down to the disc area. The Physician uses x-ray to find the right spot and then inserts a needle to the outer area of the disc(s). The disc(s) are then injected with IV dye. After each disc is tested, pictures are taken with the x-ray machine and the needles are removed.

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What happens during the procedure?

The skin on the back is scrubbed using sterile scrub (soap). Next, the physician numbs a small area of skin with numbing medicine. This medicine may sting for a few seconds. After the numbing medicine has had time to take effect, the physician directs a small needle, using x-ray guidance, into the disc space. Patients may feel temporary discomfort as the needle passes through the muscle or near a nerve root. The physician may perform this at more than one disc

level. After the needles are in their proper locations, small amounts of contrast (dye) are injected into each disc.

What happens after the procedure?

After the disc(s) are injected, some patients may be sent for a CT Scan where additional pictures are taken. Patients are usually given prescription medications for pain that they can take for a few days following the procedure. This helps with any muscle discomfort that may exist after this procedure.

General Pre/Post Instructions

Patients can eat a light meal within a few hours before the procedure. For patients who are insulin dependent diabetics, they must not change their normal eating patterns prior to the procedure. Patients may take their routine medications. (i.e. high blood pressure and diabetic medications).

PLEASE NOTIFY THE PHYSICIAN IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE A HISTORY OF A BLEEDING DISORDER OR IF YOU TAKE BLOOD THINNERS (COUMADIN, ASPIRIN, NSAIDS)

PLEASE NOTIFY THE PHYSICIAN IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE AN ALLERGY TO IV DYE

Risks Of Procedure

- -Overall complications are extremely rare
- -Increased discomfort for approximately 2-3 days following the test
- -Nerve root irritation or injury
- -Infection
- -Bleeding
- -Discitis
- -Abscess
- -Hemorrhage
- -Drug reaction
- -Nerve damage
- -No improvement
- -Paralysis
- -Death
- -Worsening of condition
- -Equipment failure
- -Soreness lasting 5-7 days

THESE RISKS ARE INTENDED TO BE A COMMUNICATION OF THE MOST REASONABLE EXPECTED COMPLICATIONS OF THE PROCEDURE AND DO NOT INCLUDE ALL CONCEIVABLE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROCEDURE

Discharge Care

- Some post discography discomfort may be present for a few days
- The area injected may be tender or bruised after the injection. Apply ice on and off every 4 hours for 24 hours for 10 minutes at a time.
- You may not drive for the remainder of the day after the procedure. An adult must be present to drive you home. This is for your safety
- No heat is to be used to injection site for the remainder of the day.
- No restrictions on your diet
- Continue routine medications as prescribed. You may take your usual pain medication the day of the procedure
- Notify the Physician on any signs of infection at injection site and or if fever develops
- No restrictions on bathing but be careful
- No driving or consuming alcoholic beverages on the day of the procedure
- Do not make any critical decisions or sign important papers for 24 hours
- If an emergency arises and you feel the situation requires immediate attention, go to the nearest emergency room. Make sure the Dr. is notified.