

## Chiropractic Care for the Herniated Disc

Every year thousands of Americans find themselves at their doctor's office suffering from back or neck pain that often radiates into an arm or a leg. A magnetic resonance imaging (M.R.I.) study may reveal a disc herniation. Many people falsely assume that they are destined for a lifetime of medication and/or surgery. However, conservative care is usually the first treatment option and yields significant recovery results for patients. The vast majority of patients diagnosed with a disc herniation will never have to see the inside of an operating room. Most spinal specialists will agree that a conservative approach should be considered before more invasive approaches are implemented.

Doctors of chiropractic work to provide the conservative approach to the treatment of disc injuries. Recent research has demonstrated that not only is chiropractic just as effective as traditional treatments, but is more cost effective as well.

So what is a disc? What is a disc herniation? The disc itself is a cartilaginous cushion between each vertebra of the spine, acting as a shock absorber. The disc facilitates motion, protects the vertebrae, and acts collectively with the vertebrae to protect the spinal cord and spinal nerves. It has a thick fibrous ring (annulus fibrosus) with a gelatinous center (nucleus pulposus), much like a jelly-filled donut. With a disc herniation, the fibrous ring breaks down, and the gel center begins to bulge outward. People often have the misconception that these discs "slip" but in reality, the disc flattens. It is this mechanical pressure of the disc on the nerves and the resulting inflammation that irritate the spinal nerves and spinal cord causing the symptoms. A disc herniation can be very mild and does not necessarily function as a definite source of pain or other symptoms. Recent research has indicated that as high as 50 percent of the population will demonstrate some degree of disc herniation on a M.R.I. study without ever having any symptoms. In many cases, the source of the symptoms is not the disc herniation itself but the resulting inflammation. This inflammation irritates and disrupts the proper function of the surrounding nervous tissue. In those cases, the symptoms may cease after reducing the inflammation.

Doctors of chiropractic use thorough neurological and orthopedic examinations to determine if conservative treatment is right for you. Unfortunately, in some cases surgical intervention is the only course of action. In most cases chiropractors will combine physical therapy modalities with spinal mobilization or decompression to help reduce the inflammation and simply allow the body to heal itself. Playing again on the slipped disc misconception, people often mistakenly think chiropractors are trying to "pop the disc into place." In reality, most chiropractors will use what is called the Flexion/Distrraction or decompression techniques. These techniques combine gentle distraction along with minimal flexion to allow relief to a compressed or flattened disc. Through gentle pumping of the isolated area, inflammation is pulled away from the nerve root reducing

symptoms. After this is accomplished the patients are then prescribed exercises that help to support the injured area and prevent further injury or relapse.

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