

Does a Herniated Disc Mean Surgery?



Back pain can put a severe crimp in your daily activities. One cause of such pain is a herniated disc, also called a slipped or ruptured disc. A common condition of the lower back that seldom requires surgery, herniated discs are most common in women and men aged 30 to 50 years, although they also occur in active children and young adults.

For most people who experience a herniated disc, home remedies work effectively to alleviate the pain. During the first 24 to 48 hours after experiencing pain, apply an ice pack to the painful area several times a day for no longer than 20 minutes at a time to reduce swelling, muscle spasm and pain. Then, after 48 hours use a heating pad or take a warm shower to relax sore tissues.

Prescription and over-the-counter medications taken on a regular schedule may also help reduce swelling and alleviate pain. These include the following:

- **nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs if your doctor agrees (they may cause stomach bleeding or other side effects)** or
- **narcotic pain relievers prescribed by your doctor for intense but short-lived pain.**

Extended bed rest is no longer recommended for back pain. Limited activity such as walking, bicycling and swimming can speed healing. Wearing a brace or back support may relieve pressure on the nerves. If, after you have tried nonsurgical treatment with no improvement for one to six months, your doctor may recommend surgery, an option eventually considered for about one out of 10 people who have a herniated disc.

While exercise is usually not advisable for acute back pain, proper exercise can ease chronic pain and reduce its risk of returning, improve your posture, keep your body in better balance and lower your chance of injury. To stretch and strengthen your back muscles, we can design a series of therapeutic exercises that, along with such passive treatments as the application of cold or heat packs, electrical stimulation, ultrasound and massage, can reduce pain, aid in healing and enable you to resume a normal routine.