This booklet provides general information on herniated discs. It is not meant to replace any personal conversations that you might wish to have with your physician or other member of your healthcare team. Not all the information here will apply to your individual treatment or its outcome.
About the Spine

The human spine is comprised 24 bones or vertebrae in the cervical (neck) spine, the thoracic (chest) spine, and the lumbar (lower back) spine, plus the sacral bones.

Vertebrae are connected by several joints, which allow you to bend, twist, and carry loads. The main joint between two vertebrae is called an intervertebral disc. The disc is comprised of two parts, a tough and fibrous outer layer (annulus fibrosis) and a soft, gelatinous center (nucleus pulposus). These two parts work in conjunction to allow the spine to move, and also provide shock absorption.
Each vertebrae has an opening (vertebral foramen) through which a tubular bundle of spinal nerves and spinal nerve roots travel. From the cervical spine to the mid-lumbar spine this bundle of nerves is called the spinal cord. The bundle is then referred to as the cauda equina through the bottom of the spine. At each level of the spine, spinal nerves exit the spinal cord and cauda equina to both the left and right sides. This enables movement and feeling throughout the body.

What is a Herniated Disc?
When the gelatinous center of the intervertebral disc pushes out through a tear in the fibrous wall, the disc herniates. This disc herniation adds pressure to the surrounding spinal nerves causing mild to severe pain. It is one of the most common spinal disorders.
What Causes Herniated Discs?

Herniated discs may be caused by simple wear and tear from repeated movement over time or disc degeneration. During the natural aging process, spinal discs lose some of their water content making it difficult to support the load from above vertebrae.

Other causes of a herniated disc may include the following:

- Long standing trauma
- Hereditary or congenital abnormalities
- Stress fractures
- A sudden heavy strain or increased pressure
What are the Symptoms?

While a herniated disc can happen at any level of the spine, it most commonly occurs in the lumbar region or lower back.

Symptoms of a herniated disc may include:

- Pain at the site of injury
- Pain, numbness, weakness, or tingling in the arms or legs
- Pain that worsens when bending, twisting, and/or sitting
- Muscle spasms

In addition to these symptoms, if the herniated disc is located in the cervical spine or neck, symptoms may include:

- Loss of bladder control
- Loss of coordination
- The feeling of heavy limbs
- Trouble balancing

If you feel that you are experiencing any of these symptoms, you should consult a physician for an accurate diagnosis.
What are the Treatment Options?
If a herniated disc is established as the diagnosis, your doctor may recommend one or more of the following treatment plans based on your specific condition:

- Physical therapy and strengthening exercises
- Rest and restriction of physical activity
- Injections (corticosteroids) to help reduce the pain and swelling
- Medications and analgesics to reduce pain and swelling (typical medications include non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs)
- Application of heat and/or ice to help reduce pain, inflammation, and muscle spasms

If your symptoms do not improve with other methods and back pain continues to diminish your quality of life, your physician may suggest spinal surgery. Surgical solutions for a herniated disc may include the following:

- Discectomy
- Laminectomy
If you have any questions about herniated discs or back pain in general, please call or see your physician, who is the only one qualified to diagnose and treat your spinal condition. This patient information brochure is not a replacement for professional medical advice.

RESOURCES

For more information about neck and back pain please visit:
www.nuvasive.com/conditions

If you would like to learn more about patient support and education for chronic back and leg pain sufferers and their loved ones, please visit:
www.thebetterwayback.org
AN INTRODUCTION TO

HERNIATED DISCS