

# Discogenic Back Pain

A Common Cause of Acute or Chronic Back Pain

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Condition Sheet

As we get older, the discs in our back go through a natural aging process. For many, this occurs without causing any noticeable symptoms. However, for others it can be the source of persistent lower back or neck pain. An estimated six million people in the U.S. live with discogenic back pain. Those most commonly affected are 30 to 60 years of age. If you are among those who suffer, the good news is that discogenic back pain usually improves with the proper medical attention. At our network of pain management centers, we can help you resolve your pain today and strengthen your spine for a healthier tomorrow.

## Understanding discogenic back pain

Discogenic pain occurs as the condition of the discs in the spine gradually changes over time. It is one of the most prevalent causes of acute or chronic back pain. You may experience only a few days of pain, or you may suffer prolonged, moderate to severe recurrent pain. Most discogenic pain occurs in the lumbar spine (lower back).

When pain occurs, it may be spontaneous or it may result from an activity. The most frequent symptoms of discogenic pain are lower back pain and spasm. Occasionally, pain may radiate to the buttocks, groin, or thighs. Typically, the pain is made worse by bending, sitting, or standing in a stationary position, and often relieved by lying down. However, mild activity such as walking may actually provide some relief.

Certain tasks, such as lifting or bending, will likely make the symptoms worse.

## Why discogenic back pain occurs

The lumbar (lower) spine has five vertebrae with soft discs in between. Each disc is composed of a tough outer ring (annulus) surrounding a soft center (nucleus). When we are young, the discs consist predominantly of water (about 80%), but as we age, the discs lose hydration and become more susceptible to cracking and fissures called annular tears. These tears lead to inflammation and pain.

## The importance of accurate diagnosis

Because back pain has so many different causes, it's important to have a skilled practitioner properly



diagnose your problem. At our network of pain management centers, we conduct a thorough clinical evaluation, beginning with a complete medical history, a physical examination, and an analysis of specific symptoms.

Tests such as an MRI are helpful in identifying signs of disc degeneration. However, since some degenerated discs do not cause pain, skilled doctors will recognize the need for other tests, such as discography\*, to identify all problematic discs.

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## Effective pain relief without surgery

Anti-inflammatory medications and physical therapy are generally the first steps in treating discogenic back pain.

If these conservative measures fail to bring significant relief, there are non-surgical options that are often successful in providing long-lasting relief.

Epidural nerve blocks\* (epidural corticosteroid injections) are very effective in resolving discogenic

pain. Another option is thermal annuloplasty (discTRODE™)\*, a minimally invasive treatment that targets the damaged disc with thermal energy. Using fluoroscopy (x-ray) guidance, thermal energy is applied to toughen the outer layers of disc tissue, sealing any small tears and deadening the nerves. Your doctor may also use a minimally invasive technique called disc rejuvenation therapy, which offers yet another treatment option.

Proven to be safe and effective, these office-based procedures may offer the benefit of alleviating your pain without surgery, without general anesthesia, and without hospital stays or long recovery periods.

*\*For more details, ask for an information sheet specific to this condition or procedure.*

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