

Slipped Disks

Because many people are familiar with the term *slipped disk*, this problem is mistakenly believed to be the chief cause of most low back pain. But, in fact slipped disks are responsible for only 5 to 10 percent of the cases.

WHAT IS A SLIPPED DISK?

The term *slipped disk* is inaccurate, because the disk doesn't slip at all; it bulges out between two vertebrae. In some cases, the tough tissues that contain the disk are weakened by injuries that allow the soft, gel-like center to protrude. If the protrusion presses on a nerve root, pinching it against the bone, the result is pain in the area of the body served by that nerve. Pain Specialist can tell which disk in the lower back is causing the problem by the part of the body affected, usually the legs.

The protruded part of the disk does not slip back into place. Scar tissue forms around the protrusion and walls it in. If the outer tissues continue to be stressed, they will weaken further and, in time, the slightest activity-sneeze or cough-may cause the disk to burst through its capsule, or rupture.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF A SLIPPED DISK?

As might be expected, pain from disk disease can rank pretty high on the pain index. To make matters worse, if a nerve root is irritated in any one place, it tends to become irritable along its whole length. A ruptured disk that presses on nerve roots in the low back (lower lumbar or high sacral areas) causes sciatica, a condition in which sharp, shooting pains begin in the buttock and run down the back of the thigh and the inside of the leg to the foot. Tingling, numbness, and weakness may follow. If the pressure on the nerve root is not relieved, the leg muscles will eventually waste away, or atrophy.

A large protrusion may also press on the nerves that branch off the end of the spinal cord (cauda equina), causing back pain, loss of sensation in the buttocks, thighs, or genital organs, and bowel and bladder disturbances. When this, or any other symptoms of nerve root pressure, occurs, help should be sought immediately.

HOW IS A SLIPPED DISK TREATED?

Conservative treatment such as bed rest, anti-inflammatory medication, and muscle relaxants often relieve the acute symptoms of a slipped disk. In some cases, epidural blocks, nerve root injections, or surgery may be necessary to relieve pressure on the nerve root. [At Newport Pain Management, we can help with your back pain. Call 949 759-8400 today.](#)