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## What is a disc bulge in the cervical spine

Hello, I am Walid from IraqCan you know the cost of treating cervical spine A bulging disc is a common condition of the spine. While a lot of people use the term interchangeably with a slipped disc or herniated disc, these conditions have unique identifying characteristics and defining traits. Depending on the severity, a bulging disc can be an asymptomatic normal sign of aging, or it can cause significant pain. A bulging disc extends beyond the ridges of the endplate or ring apophyses — the edge of the disc, though this depends on how much of the disc is affected. When it affects less than 25 percent of the disc's circumference, it is a protrusion. When it affects more than 25 percent, it is a bulge. Interestingly, neither of these is considered a herniation. RUNSTUDIO / Getty Images The discs of the spine are rubbery pads that are about a quarter of an inch thick. They have a tough outer membrane called the annulus fibrosus, and a softer, flexible core — nucleus pulposus. The annulus fibrosus is made of rings of collagen that dehydrate and stiffen over time. A bulging disc affects only this membrane. PixelsEffect / Getty Images The deterioration that leads to bulging discs is usually age-related. Discs lose their elasticity and begin to bulge downwards. This can affect multiple discs and may lead to other spinal conditions, like lumbar stenosis. Bulging discs can occur at any point along the spine, but they are most common in the lumbar region. FlyMint Agency / Getty Images Bulging discs are considered normal in some cases, particularly if they do not cause pain or interfere with the person's quality of life. Asymptomatic people may have minor bulging, most often from the seventh lumbar vertebra to the first sacral vertebra in the lower back. This can result from osteoporosis, trauma, or other spinal deformities. undefined undefined / Getty Images A bulging disc is not a specific diagnosis. Rather, it is an observation made from an image of the spine and be attributed to multiple things. It may not even indicate a true pathological change in the body and, sometimes, people with bulging discs do not even know they have them until getting a scan for some other reason. RUNSTUDIO / Getty Images At some point, almost everyone has a bulging disc somewhere in their spine. Though they rarely cause symptoms, if the disc is weak enough and the pressure grows, they can increase in severity, eventually getting larger and becoming a protruding disc. If the bulge is pushing against the nerves, it can cause tingling, weakness, or numbness. Jan-Otto / Getty Images Most bulging discs affect the lumbar spine, and multiple imaging techniques can evaluate it, depending on the pathology. The doctor will usually do an X-ray first, to identify the reason for back pain. CT scans are also useful to evaluate trauma and complex fractures, and MRIs provide in-depth information about the spinal cord, meninges, and nerve roots. stevecoleimages / Getty Images When a bulging disc is symptomatic, there are multiple treatment options available. Over-the-counter NSAIDs are effective against mild pain, but the doctor may recommend steroid injections to relieve significant nerve pain. If the bulging disc progresses to the point of lumbar stenosis, a patient may require spinal decompression surgery. Fahroni / Getty Images The main difference between a bulging disc and a herniated disc is the part of the disc that is affected. A bulging disc involves only the annulus fibrosis, but a herniated disc may affect the annulus fibrosis, nucleus pulposus, cartilage, or the apophyseal bone. A herniated disc must have material displaced from its normal location. It only occurs when there is a defect or other abnormality. Igor Vershinsky / Getty Images A degenerative disc is another term used interchangeably with a bulging disc, though they are not the same. This term includes both pathologic changes and changes of normal aging. Disc degeneration is graded based on observations from CT scans of the interior of the disc and marrow changes seen on an MRI and may or may not include a bulging disc. Eva-Katalin / Getty Images A bulging disc in the neck occurs when a spinal disc weakens and encroaches on the spinal cord. In some cases, this can cause pain in the neck, shoulders, arms, and back. Acute injury to the area can cause a bulging disc in the neck. Long-term trauma, such as poor posture or being overweight, can also cause a bulging disc in the neck. These structures in the spine tend to weaken over time, so aging can increase the risk of a bulging disc in the neck. Doing certain exercises or stretches can ease pressure on the spine and reduce symptoms. People can do this with the guidance of a physical therapist or at home. Taking pain medications can also be helpful for reducing discomfort. If these treatments are not effective, however, surgery is another option. This article will discuss the causes, symptoms, and exercises for a bulging disc in the neck. Share on PinterestA weak spinal disc can cause a bulge in the neck. The spine is made up of several interconnected bones. These are vertebrae, which protect the soft tissues, the spinal cord, and the nerves that run through the spine. To maintain their flexibility, a connective disc separates each vertebra. These spinal discs are made up of strong elastic tissues. When the spine bends or rotates, the spinal discs change in size to support the movement and prevent friction between the bones. It is possible for spinal discs to dislodge. This is most common in the lower spine. However, it can also occur in the upper portion of the spine, and it can cause a bulge into the spinal canal. In more severe cases, it can lead to a herniated disc. Herniated and bulging are terms that describe the disc. Some people compare a bulging disc to a tire that is going flat, whereas they consider a herniated disc similar to a tire blowout. Each disc contains a soft inner substance with a surrounding outer layer, which maintains the structure of the disc. A herniated disc occurs when damage to the outer layer causes the inner substance to leak out of the disc. The causes of bulging or herniated discs include sudden or long-term trauma. Having poor posture and lifting weights with improper form are examples of what can cause long-term trauma. Other possible causes include: Spinal discs weaken over time and become more vulnerable to injury. This means that aging increases the risk of a bulging or herniated disc. It depends on what begins to degenerate first. If the nucleus pulposus, or the inner soft tissue, starts to degenerate first, a disc may have no problem. However, if the annulus fibrosis, which is the outer supporting layer, starts to degenerate first, the inner nucleus pulposus may escape into the vertebral canal and press on a nerve root or the spinal cord. It is possible for a bulging disc to occur without any symptoms. In other cases, however, the disc presses on a nerve in the neck. This can cause pain in the neck, shoulders, and backpain when moving numbness or tingling in the shoulders, arms, or fingers a reduced range of motion The severity of the symptoms will depend on how much pressure there is on the nerve. The symptoms often worsen during activity and improve when resting. Alongside medication and other pain management techniques, doctors may prescribe some exercises. A person can practice these with a physical therapist or in their own home. Exercises for a bulging disc in the neck tend to involve a mix of gentle stretches and muscle-strengthening exercises. Stretching the neck can help relieve pain and pressure in the area. Neck stretches usually involve slowly moving the head backward, forward, or from side to side. Practicing exercises that strengthen the neck muscles is a longer-lasting method of easing pressure on the neck. It may also help strengthen other muscles that support the spine, such as the abdominal muscles. A physical therapist will also help improve posture and form when lifting objects and walking. This may include ensuring that the back is straight when bending the knees to lift an object from the ground. This will help reduce the risk of another injury occurring in the future. It might be best to include other forms of treatment with physical therapy and exercises. This can assist recovery. Taking certain pain relief medication can also be helpful for reducing discomfort in the neck, shoulders, arms, and back. These are typically over-the-counter medications such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and analgesics. In more serious cases, treatment could involve receiving steroidal injections to reduce pain and inflammation. The most serious cases can require cervical spine surgery. This will involve removing some or all of the disc. It may be necessary to insert a cervical plate or screw to help stabilize the spine after surgery. A bulging disc in the neck can occur when a spinal disc slips out of place. This can lead to a herniated disc, wherein damage causes the inner substance of the disc to leak out. Both conditions can cause pain in the neck. Physical therapy and exercises can help treat a bulging disc in the neck. This will include a mixture of gentle neck stretches and exercises to strengthen the neck and surrounding muscles. A range of other treatments, such as pain medication and surgery, are also available. Severe stenosis of the spine can destroy lives, leading to paralysis and other complications, such as incontinence, balance issues, weakness and numbness. It's therefore important to recognize the signs and symptoms early on and seek treatment as early as possible. Of course, prevention is the best medicine there is and this article will look at that too. Although stenosis of the spine mostly affects people over the age of 50, it can affect younger people too. Here's everything you need to know—from what it is to how to treat it and more. Essentially, stenosis of the spine (or spinal stenosis) refers to the narrowing of the spaces within it. This in turn puts pressure on the nerves, causing tingling sensations, numbness, weakness and pain. As a degenerative condition, symptoms can worsen over time. There are actually two forms of spinal stenosis, differentiated according to which part of the spine they affect. Cervical stenosis refers to a narrowing of spaces within the neck, while lumbar stenosis refers to a narrowing of spaces in the lower back. Lumbar stenosis is the most common form of spinal stenosis, but it is possible to have both types simultaneously. As mentioned, symptoms include numbness and tingling, weakness, balance problems, pain and (in severe cases) incontinence. But symptoms depend on the type of stenosis of the spine in question. Whereas lumbar stenosis is associated with numbness or tingling in the feet or legs (one or both of each), cervical stenosis can give rise to these symptoms in the hands and arms as well. The same goes for weakness. Similarly, whereas cervical stenosis may cause localized neck pain, lumbar stenosis is more likely to cause pain in the back—especially the lower back. Generally, bowel or bladder dysfunction (e.g. incontinence) is only associated with cervical stenosis. Stenosis of the spine is caused by something narrowing the space within the spine. This could be bone growth, or overgrowth, related to Paget's disease (for example). Or it may be caused by herniated disks—the cracking and drying out of the soft shock absorbers between the vertebrae. Thickened ligaments, i.e. the cords that hold the bones of the spine together, may also expand into the spinal canal to cause stenosis. Similarly, tumors or displaced bone (such as from injury) may cause swelling that narrows the spinal canal or puts pressure on the spinal cord and nerves. As stenosis of the spine may also have something to do with being overweight, one preventative measure is to maintain a healthy weight. Another is to exercise. Flexing and stretching, for example, can help to open up the spine. You should see your doctor immediately upon experiencing any of the symptoms above. The sooner you catch it, the less invasive treatment may be required. Physical therapy can help to build your strength, endurance and spinal stability, for instance, while also improving your balance. Steroid injections can also help to reduce inflammation, though they won't fix the stenosis on their own. To alleviate pain and discomfort generally, doctors may prescribe medications such as pain relievers, antidepressants, anti-seizure drugs and opioids. Surgery may be seen as a last resort degenerative spine treatment, suitable in cases where nothing else has worked. There are several types: Laminectomy: The removal of the back part (lamina) of affected vertebrae. Laminotomy: The removal of just a small portion of the lamina to relieve pressure. Laminoplasty: The creation of a hinge on the lamina (in the neck or cervical spine) using metal hardware. Another option is minimally invasive spine compression treatment or percutaneous image-guided lumbar decompression (PILD) therapy. This involves the removal of thickened ligament portions using needle-like instruments without any general anesthesia. In general, nonsurgical treatments are pursued for the first six to 12 weeks following the onset of symptoms, according to Spine-health.com. If these treatments do not improve symptoms after this time period, spinal decompression surgery is considered as an option. Surgery is also considered if symptoms progress during these treatments or the resulting pain prevents the patient from a normal level of function. Medications to treat a disc bulge include over-the-counter medications such as naproxen or ibuprofen, explains Mayo Clinic. If the pain does not subside with these medications, a doctor may prescribe a narcotic, such as Percocet or OxyContin for a short time. Doctors may also suggest medications for nerve pain, such as Lyrica or Cymbalta, as they have less severe side effects than narcotics. Muscle relaxers may also work to treat a disc bulge, as may cortisone injections. Doctors may also suggest physical therapy for a disc bulge as there are exercises that can help to minimize the pain, states Mayo Clinic. A physical therapist may also suggest traction, heat or ice, ultrasound, bracing or electrical stimulation. If nothing else works, a doctor may also suggest surgery, but only if the patient has undergone conservative treatments after six weeks. Other reasons a doctor may suggest surgery include numbness, weakness, difficulty walking or standing, or the loss of bowel or bladder control. During surgery, the doctor can usually remove the problematic portion of the disc, but other times, the entire disc may be removed, which requires fusion of the vertebrae. Herniated discs can cause a variety of different symptoms, but those symptoms can vary depending on where the disc herniation occurs in your spine. Below, we take a closer look at the symptoms of herniated discs based on where they develop in your back. See What's a Herniated Disc, Pinched Nerve, Bulging Disc...? A herniated disc occurs when the outer portion of a spinal disc breaks down and the inner portion leaks out. Watch: Herniated Disc Video For those of you unfamiliar with the sections of your spine, it can be broken down into three segments: The cervical, thoracic and lumbar portions of your spine. Since the vast majority of herniated discs occur either at the cervical or lumbar level, those are the two areas we'll be focusing on below. See Spinal Anatomy and Back Pain advertisement Herniated discs in the cervical portion of your spine are less common than in the lumbar portion of the spine because there is less disc material and much less force applied to the disc in the cervical area compared to the lumbar portion. You put a decent amount of pressure on your cervical spine when you're hunched over looking at your phone, but it's your lumbar spine that absorbs the majority of the force when you bend over to pick something up or you twist and turn your body during athletic competition. See How Does Text Neck Cause Pain? Symptoms of a herniated disc in the cervical spine differ based on the degree of herniation and the specific vertebrae in question. For example, herniation of a cervical disc will generally involve some nerve compression or impingement, and which nerves are compressed will dictate your symptoms. Compression at the C4 or C5 disc level can contribute to regionalized pain, shoulder pain or muscle weakness in the upper arms, while impingement at the C6 or C7 level can cause numbness in your fingers, weakened grip strength or pain that radiates down your arm. See Cervical Discs If your symptoms are generally expressed on the upper portion of your body, like your shoulders, arms and hands, there's a good chance that the disc herniation is housed in the cervical portion of your spine. See Cervical Herniated Disc Symptoms and Treatment Options Herniated Discs in the Lumbar Spine The most common type of herniated disc is one that develops in the lumbar spine. As you might have guessed based on its location, a disc herniated in the lower part of your spine generally affects your lower body extremities. See Lumbar Herniated Disc: What You Should Know For example, a herniated disc at the L4 or L5 level typically involves nerve root impingement of nerves that radiate down your leg, meaning you may experience leg weakness, inhibited gait or pain that radiates down your leg, especially during movement. You may also notice weakness or numbness in your feet and toes. A more serious problem associated with a herniated disc in the lumbar spine includes bladder problems, like the inability to hold or release urine. These symptoms should be examined by a doctor immediately. See Lumbar Herniated Disc Symptoms Treating Herniated Discs The majority of herniated discs will heal without surgery, but that doesn't mean you should skip out on visiting a spine specialist. They'll be able to conduct a physical exam, diagnose the location of the herniation and set you up with a specific care plan. Some common conservative treatments include: See Treatment Options for a Herniated Disc If conservative care fails, surgery can be performed to remove the problematic disc. Surgery has a high success rate, but is typically only considered if conservative care fails. For more information about your options for a herniated disc, consult with a local spine specialist. See Surgery Options for a Herniated Disc Learn more: Cervical Herniated Disc Causes and Diagnosis Non-Surgical Treatment for a Lumbar Herniated Disc

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