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# Having a Discogram

A discogram is a test in which contrast dye is injected into the center of a disk in the spine.

Disks are sponge-like cushions between the bones (vertebrae) of the spine. Disks act as a type of shock absorber for the spine. And they help give flexibility.

Contrast dye is a type of fluid that shows up on X-ray. This lets the health care provider find out if the disk is normal or not. The test may reproduce your back or leg pain. This helps your provider find which disk is causing your symptoms. The test is often done when certain treatments for pain, such as surgery, are being considered. As part of the test, an image of the disk is taken. This image shows where and how the disk is damaged.

## Possible risks and complications

Every procedure has risks. Your health care provider will discuss them with you. Some possible risks or complications of a discogram include:

- Bleeding.
- Infection.
- Nerve damage.

## Getting ready for your discogram

For your safety and the success of your test, tell your health care provider if you:

- Are pregnant or think you may be pregnant.
- Have any bleeding problems.
- Take blood thinners (anticoagulants) or other medicines, including aspirin, herbs, or vitamin supplements.
- Have any allergies.
- Have recently been sick or have any chronic conditions.

Get ready for your test as instructed. Be sure that you:

- Stop taking medicines, herbs, and supplements before the test as advised by your provider.
- Follow any directions you're given for not eating or drinking before the test.
- Arrange for someone to drive you home after the test.

## The day of your discogram

Allow plenty of time before your appointment to check in. You'll need to sign a form stating that the risks and benefits of the test have been explained to you, your questions have been answered, and you agree to the procedure. If you have questions, ask them before you sign the form. Your visit may last several hours.

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During the test, you will lie on your stomach or your side on an exam table. You may be given medicine through an IV (intravenous) line to help you relax. The health care provider cleans your lower back and covers the area with sterile drapes. The area is numbed with medicine. The provider places a needle into each disk that is being tested. Then the provider injects a contrast solution into 1 or more of the disks in your spine. A picture of the disk is taken. The provider may test more than 1 of your disks. This is so the results of the 2 tests can be compared and help to find what's causing your pain.

An injection into a disk does cause pain. But keep in mind that this will help your provider diagnose you. They will ask how your pain feels, and if it's like the pain you felt before. The pain may be worse than your normal back pain. Make sure to tell your provider how you feel.

You may be given pain medicine after the discogram. You may also have a CT scan. This imaging test gives more information about the disk. Your provider will tell you when you can get the results of your test.

## **Purpose of the exam**

A discogram may be painful. But it can give your health care provider vital information to help plan your treatment.

## **After your discogram**

- Have an adult friend or family member drive you home after the test.
- Drink plenty of water to help flush the contrast fluid from your body.
- Take it easy for the rest of the day, as advised.
- Lie down with your head flat if you get a headache.
- You may be in more pain than normal for up to 5 days after the discogram. Your health care provider may advise medicine to help ease the pain. If the increased pain lasts longer than 5 days, tell your provider.
- Short-term numbness or weakness may occur.

## **When to contact your doctor**

Contact your health care provider right away if you have:

- Pain in your back or legs that is getting worse.
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your provider.
- Chills.
- Numbness, tingling, or weakness in your legs.
- A headache that lasts for 2 days or more.