

Focus On: Herniated disc

Your spine is a long stack of bones.

The stacked bones are called vertebrae.

The vertebrae are cushioned by small, spongy discs that help protect your spine and keep it flexible.

But when a disc is damaged, it can bulge or break open and the soft center can leak out.

This is called a herniated disc.

You may also hear it called a slipped or ruptured disc.

Many people with herniated discs have no symptoms.

But when the soft center of the disc presses on the spinal nerves or spinal cord, it can cause pain, weakness, or numbness in the area of the body where that nerve travels.

These symptoms are often felt on just one side of the body. In most cases, the pain improves over several weeks, and the disc heals on its own.

To ease pain while the disc heals, you can take over-the-counter pain medicine and use ice or heat on the area. It's okay to rest for 1 to 3 days if the pain is severe, but it's important not to rest too long to avoid stiffness. Your doctor may suggest physical therapy.

If the pain does not improve, steroid injections or surgery may be an option.

To learn more about herniated discs, talk to your doctor.