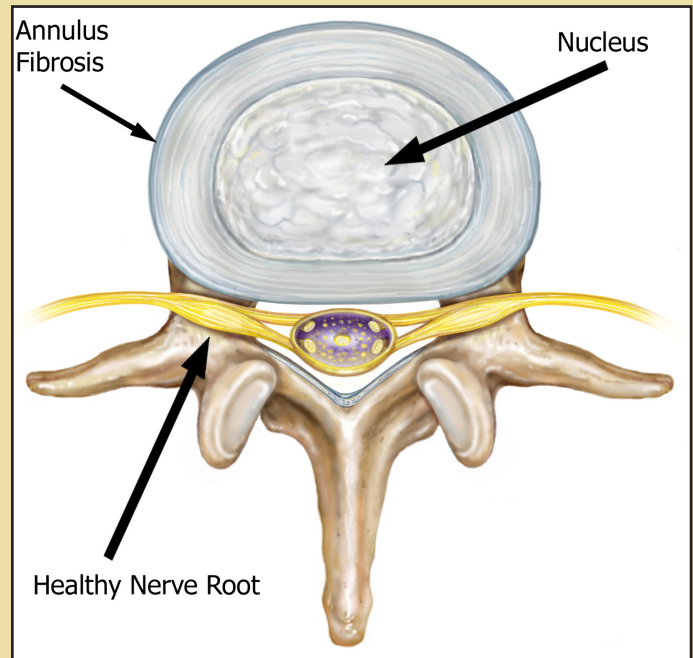


Understanding Herniated Disks

Anatomy

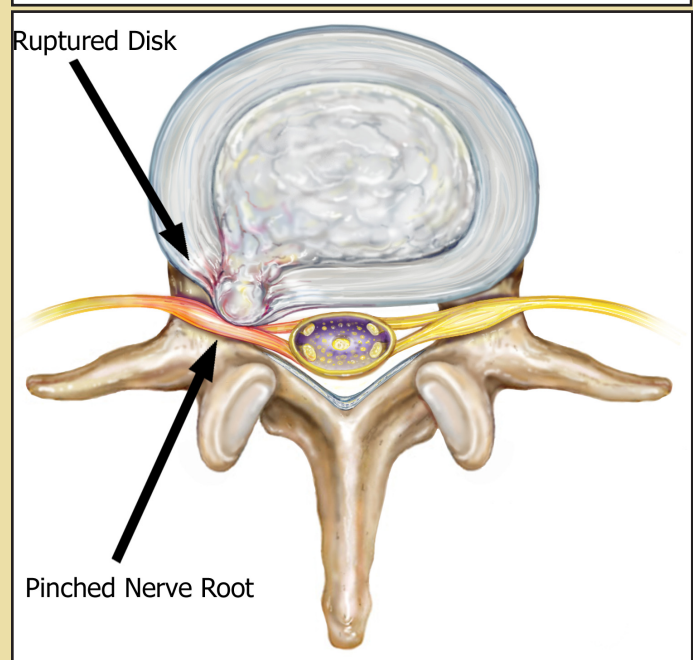
The spine is a complex structure formed by alternating rigid vertebrae and flexible cartilaginous intervertebral disks. This arrangement allows the spine to be both supportive and flexible. The intervertebral disks also act as shock absorbers and help maintain the space between the vertebrae through which the nerve roots can pass. This disk is composed of two parts. The tough outer layer is called the annulus fibrosis while the interior gel-like substance is called the nucleus.

When a disk is herniated, the soft nucleus protrudes through the ruptured annulus. This fragment presses against the nerve root as it exits the spinal canal. The resulting compression causes irritation of the nerve and leads to many of the symptoms associated with a herniated disk.



Symptoms

Symptoms vary depending on the location and severity of the herniated disk. If the rupture occurs in the cervical spine (the neck) then you may have pain in your neck that may or may not radiate down your shoulder and arm.



If the rupture is in your lumbar spine (low back) then you may have pain in that area that radiates down your leg and into your foot.

CLINIC LOCATIONS

Columbia Heights
Eagan
Forest Lake
Downtown St. Paul
Hastings
Maplewood
Vadnais Heights
Woodbury - Allina
Woodwinds
Health Campus

CONTACT INFORMATION

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(651) 842-5201

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Symptoms for disk herniation are diverse in presentation and severity. These should only be thought of as a generalization of the symptoms associated with this disorder.

Diagnosis

In order to determine the cause of your symptoms your doctor will ask you questions and conduct a thorough physical exam. X-ray is helpful in viewing the bones of the spine and can help confirm or eliminate a specific diagnosis. After your doctor has conducted a physical examination they may wish that you undergo further diagnostic tests. These may include the following:

- A MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) to view the muscles, ligaments and disks.
- A CT (computed tomography) scan to view the bones of the spine.
- An EMG (electromyography) or nerve conduction study to examine affected nerves.

Your doctor will utilize this information to formulate a treatment plan tailored to your needs.

Treatment

Many of the symptoms associated with a herniated disk will resolve after non-surgical treatments. These may include any of the following: resting for the appropriate amount of time, taking prescribed medications and applying a cold compress for twenty minutes. Additionally, your doctor may prescribe physical therapy, a supportive brace for you to wear and an epidural steroid injection. The epidural steroid injection is done as an outpatient procedure and your doctor's patient coordinator can help schedule this appointment for you.

If non-surgical treatments fail to provide relief your doctor may wish to pursue surgical treatment. You can refer to the other patient education brochures for more information regarding these procedures.

NOTES:

~~For additional educational materials regarding this topic please visit our website, www.summitortho.com and click on the "Patient Education" quick link.~~



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