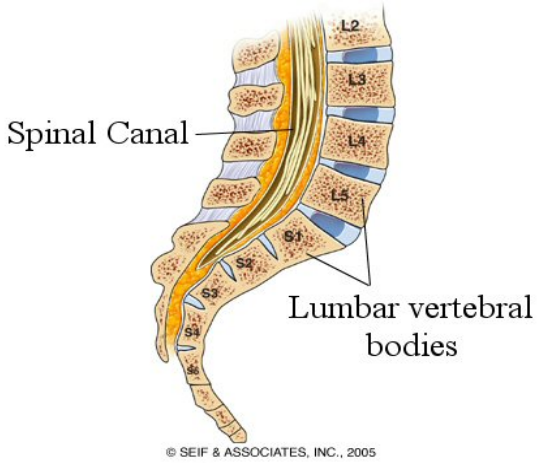
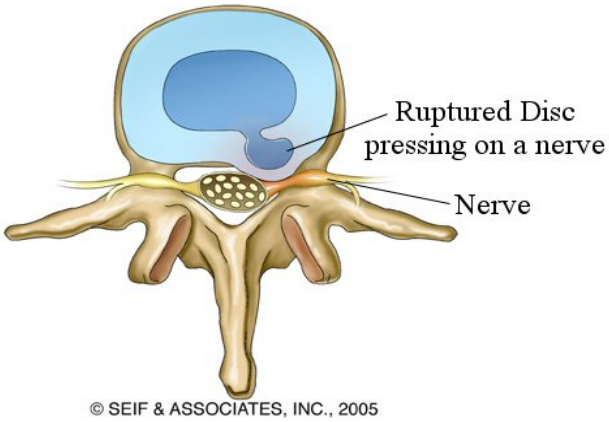
Herniated (Prolapsed) Disk

Disks are *cushions* (portion of the disc) that separate the bones in the spine (*vertebrae*) and allow mobility of your back. As we grow older, the ligaments that support and surround the disks start to weaken. A strain on the back may cause a break in the disk ligaments. The disk material may then be squeezed out between the vertebrae (it *herniates*), pressing on nearby spinal nerves. A herniated disk in the neck causes pain in the neck, shoulder, or down the arm. Herniation in the lower back may put pressure on the large sciatic nerve. This causes *sciatica* - a sharp, shooting pain from the buttock down the back of the leg. Attacks of pain tend to recur and may result in permanent backache or nerve damage. Surgery to relieve nerve pressure may be necessary.





HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS:

- If your caregiver prescribed pain medication or muscle relaxants, use as directed. DO NOT DRIVE WHILE USING THESE MEDICATIONS.
- Rest your back, giving the irritated nerves and muscles a chance to recover. Rest while in severe pain. You may read or watch TV, but you should get up only to go to the bathroom and eat meals.
- Rest and sleep on a firm mattress or put a piece of plywood between the mattress and box springs. Lie on your side with your knees slightly bent or on your back with a pillow under your knees. Do not use a waterbed because it does not support your back correctly.
- For the next 1 to 2 days, apply ice to your back to help relieve pain. Put ice in a plastic bag and place the bag on your back, with a towel between the bag and your back. You also may have someone rub ice directly over your back. Do this for 30 minutes 4 times a day, or continuously if necessary for pain relief.
- After 2 days, use a heating pad for 30 minutes, 4 times per day, or as suggested by your caregiver. **Do not sleep with a heating pad as this could cause burns.** If you have diabetes, do not use a heating pad unless instructed to do so.
- After your period of bed rest, gradually resume your normal activities. Avoid activities that cause back strain such as heavy exercise, lifting, or sitting in a slumped position.
- After your *symptoms* (problems) are improved, doing exercises that strengthen your back muscles may help prevent further problems. Walking and swimming are good exercises. Avoid exercises that put stress on your back such as rowing and jogging. Sports such as tennis and racquetball which require rapid stopping and starting are often harmful. Check with your caregiver before starting exercises.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

The pain in your back, legs, or arms gets worse, or does not get better with treatment.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have numbness, tingling, weakness, or problems with the use of your arms or legs.
- You have severe headaches not relieved with medications.
- You see a change in bowel or bladder control.
- There is increasing pain in any areas of the body.

- You experience shortness of breath, dizziness or fainting.
- You have *nausea* (feeling sick to your stomach), vomiting or sweats.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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