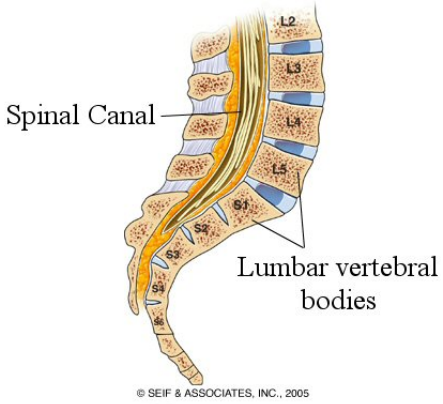
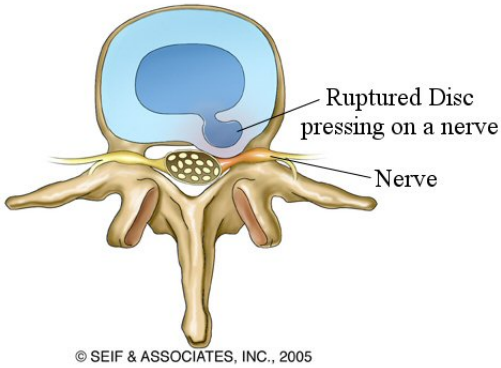
Herniated Disk

Disks are the soft tissue cushions that are found between the bones of the spine. When a disk herniates, a part of the material inside the disk pushes out and may cause pressure against the nerves near the spine. If this happens in the neck this results in pain in the neck, shoulder and down the arm. In the lower back a ruptured disk causes pain in the back, buttock and down the back of leg (*sciatica*). Numbness and weakness in the arms or legs may also be signs of a ruptured disk.



Disk herniation is very common. Only a small number of patients with disk problems need more treatment than bed rest and pain medicine for relief. **Pressures on the disks of the lower back are much higher in the sitting position. It is important that you avoid prolonged sitting until the pain and back spasms improve**. Lying on your side is the preferred position.



You should rest or sleep on a firm mattress (use a sheet of plywood under the mattress if necessary). Water beds do not provide enough support. You should avoid bending, lifting or any other activity that increases your pain. Traction applied to the neck or back may help reduce symptoms. Special braces may also be beneficial. When your pain improves, you should resume normal activity gradually. Take periods of rest throughout the day.

Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort or fever as directed by your caregiver. Cold packs applied for 30 minutes every 2-3 hours may also help relieve pain or spasms. Exercises to strengthen your back and abdominal muscles and to improve your fitness may be prescribed as symptoms improve.

Call your doctor for a follow-up appointment as recommended.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have severe pain, increased weakness or numbness, or lose control of your bladder or bowels.

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