



OH, MY ACHING BACK!

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Approximately 80% of adults will suffer at least one episode

of low back pain during their lifetime. Because the lower back supports most of the body's weight, a back ache may come from standing or sitting too long, lifting a heavy object, an athletic injury or an accident. Fortunately, most bouts with low back pain usually resolve quickly with over the counter anti-inflammatory medications and rest. Physical therapy and/or chiropractic treatments may be helpful as well. The key is to know when to seek medical attention and when self-care measures alone are not helping you to get better.

A condition that may require specialized medical attention is known as a herniated disc. People will often refer to a "slipped" or "ruptured" disc in their lower back as the source of their back pain. Discs are soft, rubbery pads found between the hard bones that make up the spinal column. The discs are like shock absorbers which also allow the back to flex or bend. When a disc is damaged, it may bulge or break open. This is known as a herniated disc, a slipped or ruptured disc.

The causes of a herniated disc can be:

- 1)Wear and tear. As you age, your discs may dry out and become less flexible.
- 2)Injuries to the spine can cause the discs to break and the gel like substance inside is forced out through the tears or cracks. This causes the disc to bulge, break open or break into pieces.

When a herniated disc presses on the nerve roots in the spine, it can cause pain, numbness and weakness down the leg. This pain is called sciatica and it is the most common symptom of a herniated disc in the low back.

A herniated disc is diagnosed using several methods such as obtaining a thorough patient history and physical examination. Sometimes specialized tests such as an MRI are used to confirm a herniated disc or to rule out other health problems.

At Somers Orthopaedic Surgery, Dr. Andy Peretz (Spine Surgeon) uses a multidisciplinary approach with Dr. Nicholas Panaro (Rehabilitative Medicine and Pain Management) to treat these conditions. A patient may require physical therapy and epidural steroid injections into the spine to alleviate the pain associated with a herniated disc. They also use alternative treatments such as chiropractic care and acupuncture.

Approximately 85% of the patients with sciatic symptoms will see an improvement in their condition within three months. If the sciatic pain does not resolve, surgery may be indicated to remove the herniated portion of the disc in order to stop the nerve inflammation and compression. This procedure is called a microdiscectomy. The surgical outcome is very predictable with approximately 90% of the patients able to return to their normal lifestyle and activities.

A few common sense tips can prevent back injuries before they happen.

- Plan ahead and get help if you are lifting or moving heavy objects.
- Avoid awkward stretching and lifting.
- Maintain a healthy body weight. Excess weight puts an extra load on the back muscles.
- Stay in shape, exercise regularly, and eat healthy.

