

Discography

What is discography?

Intervertebral discs are the “cushions” between the bones of your spine (called vertebrae). When these discs age, they can cause pain. Discography is a procedure where a needle is placed into the discs in your spine, and contrast material (“x-ray dye”) is injected.

This procedure is performed to evaluate the internal structure of the discs and to see if the pain you are having is coming from one or more specific discs. This test can help the surgeon decide what surgery, if any, can be done to help your pain.

What can I expect during the procedure?

You will lie on your stomach. The area around the upper, mid, or lower back will be cleansed with an antiseptic to decrease the chance of infection. The skin will be numbed with a local anesthetic. Next, using fluoroscopic (x-ray) guidance, a thin needle will be passed through the skin and into each disc of question as well as a normal disc.

The position of each needle is checked using x-ray. When all the needles are placed, contrast is injected slowly into each disc. Frequently, a CT scan of the region will be performed next to get additional information about the structural integrity of each disc.

Is the procedure painful?

Most patients experience little discomfort while the needles are placed. Numbing medicine can be given if you feel pain during the needle insertion.

There will be discomfort when normal and diseased discs are injected. We do not like causing a great deal of pain. However, some pain is necessary for you to be able to distinguish between which levels are causing your pain and which are not.

How long does the procedure take?

Your appointment takes approximately 75 minutes from the time you arrive at the department until the time that the procedure is completed. Immediately after the procedure, the radiologist may want you to stay for up to one hour in the radiology department for observation.

What are the risks of the procedure?

Discography is an invasive procedure. Complications which may occur during these procedures may include: temporary weakness or numbness if local anesthetic spreads around the nerves coming from the spine (rare).

With thoracic discograms, there is a risk of pneumothorax (the lung is punctured by the needle and partially collapses). This complication is **extremely rare**. Inserting a tube in the chest can treat a pneumothorax, if necessary.

On rare occasions, patients will have a bad reaction to the contrast dye used which contains iodine. Tell your doctor about any allergies you have.

Bleeding and infection are risks of any invasive procedure. Tell your doctor if you take any blood thinners. Afterward, you should notify a physician if you develop fevers or chills.

What happens after the procedure?

You will need someone to drive you home.

There can be mild pain related to the disc injections following the procedure which may last for 1-2 days. Pain can be managed with the pain medications you have been taking prior to this procedure.

What about other medications I am taking?

You should talk to the doctor who prescribed any blood thinning medication before resuming it.

You may continue taking your other pain medications after the procedure, if necessary.

Where can I get additional information regarding this procedure?

Ask your doctor or contact **Orthopedic Imaging Center** at **210-617-9100**.

To schedule, please call our offices: 210-617-9000