

*Better
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Patient information

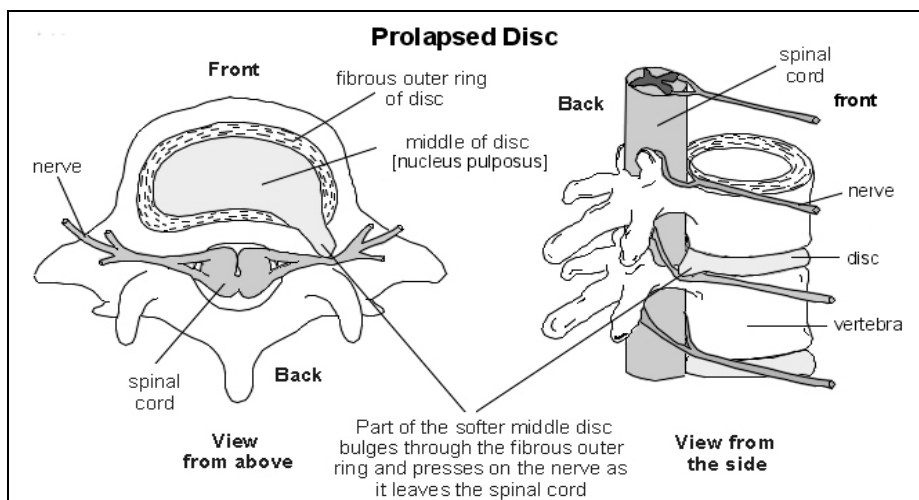
Acute Nerve Root Pain

Therapies Directorate

What is Nerve Root Pain?

The spinal cord is housed within the protective spinal column of vertebrae. Spinal nerves come from the spinal cord and exit at each vertebral level. Nerve root pain occurs when the nerves leaving the spine are pinched or irritated. The nerves provide sensory (allowing you to feel) and motor (allowing the muscles to function) information to the entire body. Irritation of the nerve roots can interfere with their normal function.

Nerve Root Compression Due to a Disc Prolapse



Causes

Nerve root pain occurs when the space where the nerve exits is narrowed. This can be due to a variety of causes. The most common causes are disc bulges (herniations/ prolapses), or degenerative narrowing (changes in the joints or thickening of the soft tissues).

Symptoms

People with nerve root pain often describe it as a sharp or burning pain radiating or shooting into the limbs. **It is not unusual for the spine itself to be pain free.**

You may also experience pins and needles, numbness and weakness in one or both limbs. The symptoms will relate to specific patterns dependent on which nerves are affected.

Diagnosis

A variety of approaches are used:

1. Patient complains of specific symptoms
2. Physical examination – an examination of movement of the spine and neurological function (i.e. sensation, muscle strength and reflexes) in the limbs
3. Some patients may be referred for an MRI scan to aid diagnosis and management.

Management

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy may help to decrease your symptoms by maintaining or improving your movement and encouraging you to remain active. In some cases manual therapy has been shown to be beneficial. Bed rest should be avoided. Also, reduce activities that aggravate your symptoms such as lifting or prolonged sitting until your symptoms settle. Please remember that symptoms may take several weeks to improve.

Medication

Simple analgesics are the first line of pain relief. Your Doctor may consider other medication that works directly on the nerve. Please discuss with your family doctor (GP) before starting any medication.

Surgery

Surgery is only required in some cases of nerve root compression (less than 1 in 10). A referral to an Orthopaedic or Spinal Consultant would then be considered.

Further Information

Therapies Directorate

Tel: 0151 706 2760

Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 2760

Author: Therapies Directorate

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