

DISCOGRAM

What is it?

Discogram is an examination of the intervertebral discs. It is a diagnostic procedure in which X-ray dye is injected into the discs of the spine. It is used to determine which disc(s) are damaged and if those discs are responsible for causing pain. The discogram may be normal or may show tears (fissures) in the lining of the disc. The results of discogram are used to plan surgery.

What is the purpose of Discogram/Discography?

Discogram is done to answer the questions “Is my back pain or neck pain from a degenerated disc?” and “Which discs – if any – are causing my pain?”

How do I know if my pain is from a damaged disc?

With age or from an injury, the wall of the spinal discs can get cracks or tears (fissures). This condition is called Internal Disc Disruption or Degenerative Disc Disease. Also, the wall of the disc can weaken and bulge out

(a herniated disc). When the disc causes pain, the pain is usually felt as a deep, aching pain in the back and sometimes in the buttocks and into the thigh. However, pain from facet joints in the back and from the sacroiliac joints (SI joints) can be in the same location and feel the same. The best way to tell if the pain is from a damaged disc is with discogram.

What preparation is needed for the examination?

You will be given antibiotic cover prior to coming to the X-ray Department. This is to prevent you from contracting any infection. You will be put in a theatre gown. You should not have anything to eat for 4 hours before the procedure. However, you can have clear fluids only. The Radiology Nurse will visit you on the ward to explain the procedure.

You must bring any prior MRI scans with you for the procedure.

How is Discogram performed?

The procedure is done in the X-ray department under fluoroscopic (X-ray) guidance followed by a CT scan. For lumbar discogram (discs in the lower back), it is done with you lying on your stomach. For cervical discogram (discs in the neck), it is usually done with you lying on your back.

There will be a Radiology Nurse present during the procedure to monitor you and administer intravenous sedation if needed. The doctor will cleanse your skin over the injection site(s) with an antiseptic solution and inject local anaesthetic to the injection site (s). Radio-opaque dye are injected into the discs and the doctor may repeat the injections at 2-3 levels as ordered by your consultants. After the injection, you are placed on your back or on your side.

What will I feel during the injection?

When a normal disc is injected, you will feel a sense of pressure, but not pain. When an abnormal disc is injected, you will feel pain.

It is important to try and tell if the pain you are feeling is your usual pain or different. With each disc injected, you will be asked if it is painful, where you feel the pain and whether it is in the same area as your usual pain.

How many discs will be injected?

Based on your symptoms and your MRI, we will identify which discs we suspect are causing your pain. These discs will be injected.

How long does Discogram/Discography take?

Discogram/Discography takes about 30 minutes to one hour, depending on how many levels are injected.

What is actually injected?

The injection consists of X-ray dye (X-ray contrast). The X-ray dye used at the Princess Grace Hospital X-ray department is called Omnipaque 300 mg I/ml.

Will the injections hurt?

The procedure involves inserting a needle through skin and deeper tissues (like a “tetanus shot”), so there is some discomfort involved. However, you doctor will numb the skin and deeper tissues with a local anaesthetic using a very thin needle prior to inserting the needle into the disc.

You may have a flare-up of your back pain after the injection, but this gets better in a day or two and can usually be managed with ice packs and oral pain medication.

Will I be “put out” for this procedure?

No. This procedure is done under local anaesthesia. Injection of a medicine like Novocaine-Lidocaine is performed to numb the skin. The amount of sedation given depends upon the patient. You can be sleepy while the needles are placed, but during the discogram/discography injections, you need to be awake enough to tell the doctor what you are feeling.

Will my pain be better after the injection?

No. Discogram/discography does not treat your condition. It is a diagnostic test that allows your doctors to plan your therapy.

What should I do after the procedure?

You will need a ride home. We advise the patients to take it easy for a day or so after the procedure. You may need to apply ice to the affected area for 20-30 minutes at a time for the next day. Perform the activities as tolerated by you.

Can I go to work the next day?

We usually recommend taking 2-3 days off work after the injection.

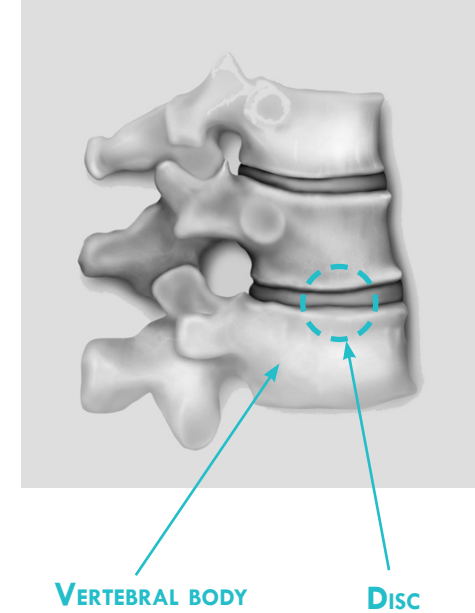
What are the risks and side effects of discogram/discography?

Generally speaking, this procedure is safe. However, with any procedure there are risks, side effects, and the possibility of complications. The most common side effect is pain, which is temporary. Sometimes, the discogram/discography needle brushes past a nerve root and the nerve root is irritated. This pain almost always gets better quickly. The other risks involve infection, bleeding, and worsening of symptoms. Fortunately, the serious effects and complications are uncommon.

Who should not have this procedure?

If you are allergic to any of the medications to be injected, if you are on a blood thinning medication (e.g. Coumadin®, Plavix®, or if you have an active infection going on, you should not have the procedure. You should not have discogram/discography if you have not tried simpler treatments such as activity restriction and anti-inflammatory medications.

Illustrations of Spine



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