

WHEENK! HEALTH

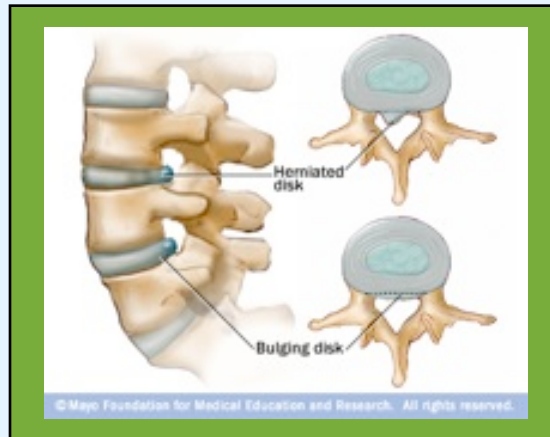
HERNIATED DISK VS. BULGING DISK

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

YOUR SPINE IS MADE UP OF BONES (VERTEBRA) CUSHIONED BY SMALL OVAL PADS OF CARTILAGE OR DISKS. THE DISK CONSISTS OF A TOUGH OUTER LAYER (ANNULUS FIBROSUS) AND A JELLY-LIKE, SOFT INNER LAYER (NUCLEUS PULPOSUS). A BULGING DISK EXTENDS OUTSIDE THE SPACE IT SHOULD NORMALLY OCCUPY. THE BULGE TYPICALLY AFFECTS A LARGE PORTION OF THE DISK, SO IT MAY LOOK A LITTLE LIKE A HAMBURGER THAT IS TOO BIG FOR IT'S BUN. OFTEN "BULGING" IS CONSIDERED TO BE PART OF THE NORMAL AGING PROCESS, THEREFORE IS COMMON TO SEE ON MRI'S, AND OFTEN PAIN-FREE.

A HERNIATED DISK RESULTS WHEN A CRACK IN THE TOUGH OUTER LAYER OF CARTILAGE ALLOWS SOME OF THE SOFTER MATERIAL INSIDE TO PROTRUDE OUT THE DISK. WHEN A HERNIATED DISK OCCURS, A SMALL PORTION OF THE NUCLEUS PUSHES OUT THROUGH A TEAR IN THE ANNULUS INTO THE SPINAL CANAL. THE HERNIATED REDUCES THE AMOUNT OF SPACE FOR THE NERVES TO PASS THROUGH, WHICH CAN IRRITATE A NERVE AND RESULT IN PAIN, NUMBNESS OR WEAKNESS IN YOUR BACK AND OFTEN IN A LEG OR ARM.

BULGING DISKS ARE MORE COMMON, WHILE HERNIATED DISKS ARE MORE LIKELY TO CAUSE PAIN, ALTHOUGH MANY PEOPLE HAVE BULGING DISKS OR HERNIATED DISKS THAT CAUSE NO PAIN WHATSOEVER. MOST PEOPLE RESPOND TO CONSERVATIVE, NON-SURGICAL TREATMENTS, SUCH AS ANTI-INFLAMMATORY MEDICATIONS, ICE, HEAT, GENTLE MASSAGE AND PHYSICAL THERAPY. WHEN CONSERVATIVE TREATMENTS DON'T HELP, BACK SURGERY MAY BE INDICATED, BUT DOESN'T HELP EVERY TYPE OF BACK PAIN. IN FACT, BACK SURGERY IS USUALLY INDICATED IN ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF CASES. BACK SURGERY IS USUALLY INDICATED WHEN SPINAL NERVES ARE COMPRESSED, CAUSING NUMBNESS ALONG THE BACK OF YOUR LEG.



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