

Discography

- **What is discography?**

Discography involves the injection of contrast dye into the center of a disc under x-ray control. It is strictly a diagnostic procedure (trying to find the location of where the pain is coming from). Local anesthesia is used during the procedure.

- **What is the purpose of discography?**

Discography is used to determine whether or not pain is coming from a disc as well as identifying abnormalities in the disc. Abnormalities can include disc herniations, tears, fissures. These abnormalities are clinically significant when they reproduce a patient's pain.

- **Which patients are candidates for discography?**

Patients that have significant pain and have undergone conservative management are candidates for discography. Conservative management for the lower back usually includes medication, physical therapy, epidural steroid injections. Patients should also have had an MRI scan to identify disc abnormalities. Typically, patients with lower back discogenic pain experience pain with sitting and forward bending. However, it should be kept in mind that the symptoms are not specific. Patient may have other symptoms such as pain with extension or rotation of the back.

- **Are discograms painful?**

Discography is usually not very painful. Local anesthetics are used. However, because of the very nature of discography, patients with positive discograms will have pain during the disc injection. This will usually subside after a few minutes.

- **Are there any risks or side effects associated with discography?**

There are few risks associated with discography. Because the procedure is performed under sterile conditions, the risk of infection is minimal. In addition, patients are given antibiotics for the procedure. Patients usually have some injection site tenderness that lasts up to one week.

- **What if discography does not reproduce my pain or does not elicit any pain during injection of the disk?**

This indicates that it is not likely that pain is coming from the disk. This can even be true if the disk is herniated or has a fissure. The reproduction of pain is the single most important factor in determining whether a subsequent intervention (such as the intradiscal electrothermal therapy (IDET) procedure, surgery) on a disk will be successful in reducing the patient's pain. In the event that the discogram does not reproduce pain, consideration should be made for other diagnostic interventions.