

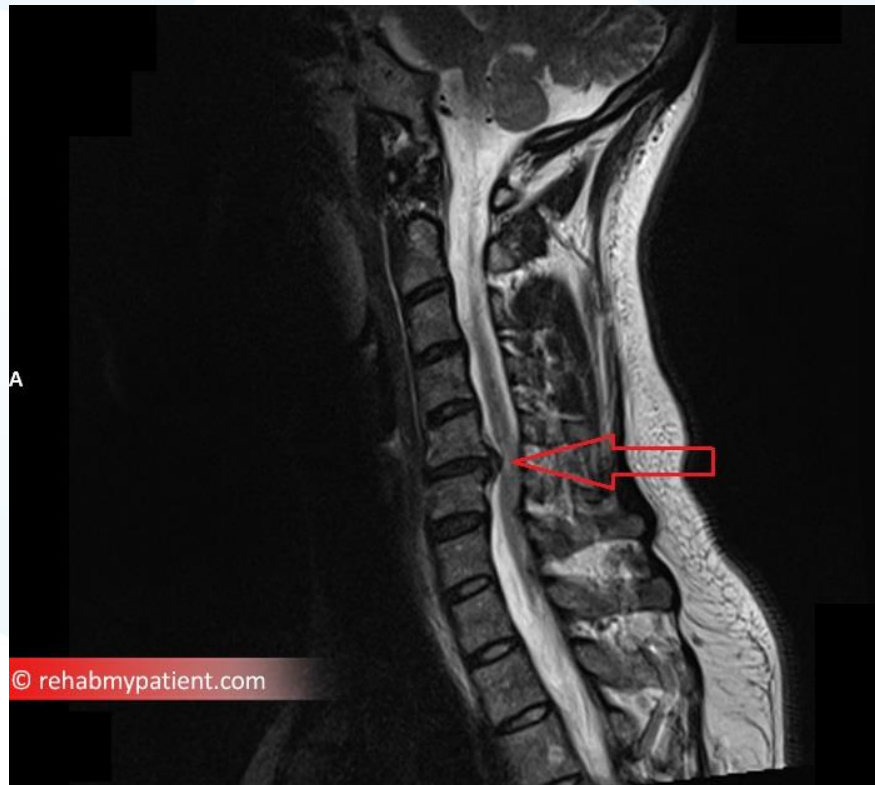
Cervical Disc Herniation

The bones (vertebrae) forming the spine within your back are cushioned by flat, round discs. When the discs are healthy, they are similar to that of a shock absorber for the spine. They help to keep the spine flexible. If these discs become damaged, they may end up bulging abnormally and breaking open, which is referred to as a slipped or herniated disc. A herniated disc can occur within any part of the spine, but they tend to be most common at the neck (cervical spine) and the lower back (lumbar spine). Seven vertebrae between the upper back and the head make up the cervical spine.

Cervical Disc Herniation Anatomy

The spine is made up of the lower and upper back and the neck. Your spine is an upright row of bones that are stacked on top of each other, which are referred to as the vertebral column. Individual bones within the spine are referred to as the vertebrae. The vertebral column begins underneath the skull and runs all the way down to the buttocks.

The front of the vertebrae is a solid, round cylinder of bone. Between each vertebra a disc is attached to the base of the vertebrae directly above it, as well as to the vertebrae that are underneath it. The discs serve as a rubber cushion in-between all of the vertebrae. Strong muscles and ligaments keep the vertebral column together. All of the structures work together to support, protect and surround the spinal cord.



An MRI scan showing a cervical disc herniation

Causes of Cervical Disc Herniation

The most common cause is repetitive forward neck bending. Use of iPads, tablets, smart phones and laptops has left us more susceptible to disc herniations. Other causes and contributing factors include genetics (weak fibres in the disc can run in families), poor nutrition, poor posture (especially forward head posture), and trauma (such as a sports injury, or road traffic accident).

How to Treat a Cervical Disc Herniation:

1. Physical Therapy

Physical therapy treatment can include modalities like ice, heat, massage, electrical stimulation and ultrasound. Active physical therapy consists of weight lifting, stretching and cardiovascular exercise. By exercising to help restore strength and motion to the lower back, you will notice a release in pain. Your therapist might also use traction to offload the pressure on the disc. They will also advise you what activities you are doing that may be contributing to your problem.

2. Neck Collar

A neck collar or brace can sometimes be used to treat a cervical disc herniation. One of the common braces is that of a corset-type that wraps around the stomach and the back. Even though a brace might not always be helpful, some people do notice that they feel more comfortable and stable when they have one in place.

3. Disc Replacement (Surgery)

In this particular procedure, the disc is removed and replaced with an artificial spacer. The underlying goal for this procedure is to provide the spinal segment with flexibility and normal range of motion. Surgery may be performed through the front of the neck, or the back of the neck, and is often called micro-discectomy due to the small incision that is made. When surgery is performed from the front of the neck, the incision tends to heal better and be less noticeable. Recovery following surgery is typically about 12 weeks, but can be 24 weeks.

Tips:

- Stop forward neck bending! Keep your eyes on the horizon when you walk and reduce your laptop, smart phone and tablet use.
- Combining aerobic exercise with specific exercises will help to keep the muscles around your neck stronger.
- Poor posture significantly raises your likelihood of cervical disc herniation, so concentrate on keeping good form. If you are not sure, seek advice from your osteopath, chiropractor or physio.
- Nicotine and smoke cause the spine to quickly age.
- Maintain good range of mobility in your neck by doing the right exercises. Your www.rehabmypatient.com therapist will advise you what you should and should not be doing with regards to exercises.