



**OPTIMA
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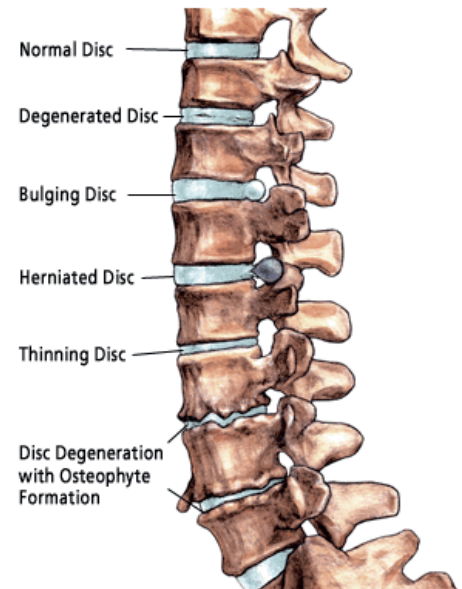
Lumbar (lower back) disc injuries

What is a lumbar disc?

Your spine is a column of bony vertebrae, which are stacked one on top of the other. In between these bones are discs. Discs are essentially a bag lined with ligaments that is filled with a thick gel (see normal disc). Discs help protect our spine by acting as cushions.

How are discs injured?

Discs are injured when the ligaments lining the bag are acutely injured. You can think of this similar to spraining an ankle ligament. Bending forward to pick up an object is the most common way a disc injury occurs. This is further exacerbated by bending with side bending or twisting. Disc injuries can cause moderate to severe low back, butt and thigh pain. It is common for there to be a resting ache and a sharper grabbing pain with some movements. Patients often report very simple movements that cause the acute pain.



I have a pins and needles, numbness and a shooting pain down my leg, why is this?

Sometimes when a disc is injured, the lining of the bag is compromised and the gel contents push out and compress the nerves that leave the spinal column and travel down into the legs (see bulging disc and herniated disc). Compression of these nerves can cause sharp, shooting pains down your leg as far as your toes. Lumbar nerve compression can also cause numbness and aberrant pins and needles sensations in the leg. This condition can take months to recover. Generally numbness and pins and needles indicates greater compression and should be viewed with caution.

How long will it take for the disc to get better?

Just like when injuring an ankle ligament, it takes time for the inflammation and pain of a disc sprain to settle. Disc injuries are often very sore for 10-14 days but can be sore for months. It is also very common for the back muscles surrounding the injured disc to go into spasm and cause significant pain.



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What will help the pain?

During this initial 10-14 day period, there are several ways to help your pain. Your physiotherapist can provide gentle pain-relieving manual therapy to the joint, massage or dry needling to the muscles in spasm, apply protective taping and electrotherapy to decrease inflammation. Anti-inflammatory drugs are often helpful muscle relaxants and pain killers may also be beneficial but you should consult your pharmacist or doctor regarding them. Doing as much pain-free movement as possible will also help. Care should be taken to avoid movements that cause your sharp grabbing pain, which occurs when you put strain on the injured ligaments. In the first 48 hours, heat will usually be harmful because it can increase the inflammatory process. Please check with your treating physiotherapist if you are unsure. After the 10-14 day period, rehabilitation will focus on regaining range of motion and postural control of your lower back.