

DISCOGRAPHY

This procedure is primarily a diagnostic test and is used to determine if you have pain which is being generated by one of your lumbar intervertebral discs. The discs are components of your lumbar spine which basically serve as a shock-absorber. They have a soft gelatinous-type center which is surrounded by a tough fibrous outer layer. Unfortunately, disruption or degeneration of these discs can lead to pain in the low back and occasionally into the legs. No test can definitively tell a physician when pain is being generated by a disc, despite the anatomic appearance on imaging of the disc. Even MRIs cannot determine whether the pain is being generated by a particular disc.

For this reason, a pain specialist may need to inject the disc with a small amount of contrast material to see if this reproduces your pain in its usual distribution. The results of this test can then be used to focus or direct further treatment. The internal anatomy of the disc will also be evaluated by continuous x-ray imaging (fluoroscopy). Frequently, a CAT scan of the lumbar spine will be done immediately after the discogram so we can get a clearer picture of the disc anatomy.

The test is done as an outpatient and is generally done with some mild-to-moderate sedation. The physician cannot administer a deep anesthetic because he will need to communicate with you about your responses during the injection. Most patients tolerate this procedure well, with discomfort which lasts for a short period of time. You may feel “achy” for the next day or two after the injection; however, many patients can return to work within 2-3 days. There is a very low risk of complications from this procedure, such as bleeding, infection, neurologic injury, or puncture of the dura which can lead to a spinal headache. Your physician will discuss these possible complications with you. Again, it must be emphasized that this is a diagnostic test and that there will be no therapeutic benefit from this injection, itself. It does, however, direct further treatment which can be very effective therapeutically.

If you have any further questions about the procedure, please feel free to contact our office at (760) 753-1104.