



DISC BULGE OR 'SLIPPED DISC'

What is a disc?

It is a spongy shock absorbing disc in your spine located between each of the vertebra in your spine from your neck to the bottom of your spine

What is a disc bulge?

When one or more of these discs start to degenerate or breakdown allowing the soft central part of the disc to bulge and distort in shape, protrude or even in severe cases herniate

When the disc does this, the space it bulges or protrudes into contains important nerves that are coming from your spinal cord or in severe cases onto your spinal cord.

The symptoms will vary depending on the level in the spine and exactly what structures and nerves are being irritated or compressed by the disc bulge. Disc bulges happen most commonly in the lower back and less commonly in the neck.

All disc bulges require expert investigation by a health professional and imaging of the spine and

discs in order to accurately diagnose this condition.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Usually a fit young adult (20-45yrs)
- Onset may be nothing or a minor strain such as bending, twisting or lifting, pain onset may be days later
- Pain can be dull, aching or knife like, felt centrally or on one side usually in the lower back
- Initially pain may be intermittent and relieved by change in position
- Pain is often aggravated by sitting, straining, coughing or sneezing
- Pain usually becomes severe and may disturb sleep
- Patient may have had previous 'episodes'
- Leg pain may follow back pain usually just on one side
- associated neurological symptoms may

include parathesia, numbness, leg cramps or weakness

What is the treatment?

- You should consult your Osteopath so that they can assess your signs and symptoms and examine you in order to diagnose your pain correctly.
- You will probably need to be referred for imaging (if you have not been already) in order to confirm the diagnosis
- Stretches, general exercise, ergonomic modification and rehabilitation exercises shown to be effective for this condition and your Osteopath can advise you on exactly what exercises and how to do them
- Your Osteopath may be able to help relieve some of the associated muscle pain and pressure and enable your 'episode' to settle
- Medications such as anti-inflammatories and analgesics can be helpful but should only be taken under the direction of a health care professional. Long term use of medications can have serious side effects
- In severe cases when the 'episode' of pain does not settle you may need to be referred to a specialist. A specialist may be able to help reduce inflammation by referring for Corticosteroid and other injections - to reduce/control inflammation and pain or a surgical opinion.

What is the prognosis?

- Disc bulges do not resolve on their own and move back into the disc space. They can not be pushed, massaged or manipulated back into place.
- Episodes of pain caused by the disc bulge may settle but the bulge is often still present and care must be taken not to re-irritate the disc bulge.
- Specific exercises, stretches and lifestyle modifications will help to avoid re-occurrence and stop further degeneration.
- Disc bulges can often become long term problems with 'episodes' of reoccurrence over many years
- If you are overweight, reducing down to a healthy weight will help to improve the condition

What not to do

- Lifting, bending and twisting movements
- Limit coughing, straining, jarring and extra weight and pressure when possible
- Apply your own stretches or exercises with our expert advice and some stretches and exercises will definitely cause more damage and pain
- Self diagnose or self prescribe medications