

An information guide to DISCOGRAPHY

What is a discogram:

A discogram is a diagnostic procedure performed to view and assess the internal structure of a vertebral disc. This procedure will determine if the disc is a source of pain.

How is it done?

To perform a lumbar spine discogram, the patient is positioned on his side after the gown and underwear have been removed. The back is cleansed with betadine and covered with sterile towels. A local anesthetic (numbing agent) is injected into the patient's skin in the area that is being examined. Under fluoroscopy (x-ray), a needle is placed through the anesthetized skin. A second needle is advanced through the initially placed needle. It is the second needle that is advanced into the disc.

To perform a cervical discogram the patient is positioned on his back, after having removed the gown. Ladies may keep the top gown on but may have to remove their brassier. *If garments are kept on, please keep in mind that the betadine may stain the garment.) The neck is cleansed with betadine and surrounded by sterile towels. Your face will be covered. Then, one needle is placed and advanced into the disc space.

Contrast, a radiopaque dye, is injected into each disc being examined. If the disc being examined is the source of pain, the introduction of the contrast will reproduce the patient's usual pain symptoms. X-rays will be taken after the discs have been examined. The needles will be removed and you will have a post-discography CT scan to obtain images of contrast distribution. This will demonstrate annular tears, scarring, disc bulges, and changes in the morphology of the disc. After the CT scan the patient can change and go home.

Expected Results:

- Recreation of painful symptoms if the disc/discs is abnormal
- Confirmation of a diagnosis and/or determination of which disc/discs is the source of pain
- Control (normal) discs do not cause pain.

What else do I need to know about a discogram?

How do I prepare for the test?

- Medicines: STOP taking any analgesics (i.e. Tylenol, Relafen, Ultram, Vicodin, Percocet) ONE day prior to the procedure. Any blood thinners such as aspirin, Coumadin, heparin or lovenox, as well as any herbal medicines that may thin your blood, must be STOPPED THREE days in advance of your test date. The oral diabetic agent, GLUCOPHAGE, must be held the day of and 48 hours post procedure. **Please notify the staff if you are currently taking either an anticoagulant (blood thinner) or glucophage. Before stopping any medication, please obtain permission from the provider who ordered that medication.**
- Fasting: Nothing to eat or drink six (6) hours prior to the procedure. You may have light meals up until that time. Do **NOT** have any products containing caffeine (i.e. coffee, tea, chocolate) for 24 hours prior to the exam. Decaffeinated products (coffee, tea) are permissible.

- **Pregnancy:** if there is any possibility that you may be pregnant, you cannot have this procedure due to x-ray exposure. The nursing staff will want to know the last date of your menstrual cycle prior to your examination.
- **Allergies:** Advise the staff of any known drug or food allergies prior to the test. If you have an allergy to contrast dye, IVP dye or shellfish, this exam will be performed using a separate contrast called Gadolinium.

What do I need to bring with me?

- **Driving:** You must bring someone with you to drive you home. Initially you will experience pain. For your comfort and safety let someone else be responsible for your transportation.
- **Films:** You **MUST** bring your **most recent** MRI FILMS with you. If you are unsure of where to find your films, please contact the nursing staff. If we have your films, or if your MRI was taken elsewhere, please notify the staff at least one week prior to the procedure.

What to expect before the procedure?

- **Time:** Overall the discogram is approximately one to two hours long. The injection of the contrast takes approximately ten to fifteen minutes. Positioning the patient, placement of the needles, taking x-rays and the CT scan account for the rest of the time spent during the procedure.
- You will need to sign a consent form and draw a pain diagram.

What should I expect after the discogram?

- You may require anywhere from 24 to 48 hours of bed rest after the procedure. The doctors will let you know the specific time frame after the discogram. Please plan your work and social calendar accordingly.
- You may be sore for a period of 5 to 10 days after the exam. Lumbar discograms may experience increased low back and leg pain, and cervical discograms may experience increased arm and neck pain.
- Ice to your low back 4-5 times a day, for 15-20 minutes at a time should be used to relieve local soreness and inflammation. Never apply ice directly to your skin, place a towel between your back and the ice pack. This may also shorten the recovery time.
- Drink plenty of water, 8-10 glasses a day, for 2-3 days to properly hydrate your body. The water will efficiently flush the contrast out of your body.
- You may resume pre-procedure medications immediately. ***Exception – Glucophage***
- Make a follow-up appointment for one to two weeks post procedure to see the doctor back in the office to discuss the results of the discogram and CT scan.
- If you experience any of the following symptoms, notify your treating physician **IMMEDIATELY:**
 - Severe chest pain or difficulty with breathing or swallowing
 - Severe back or neck pain accompanied with the inability to sit or support your head
 - Fever, night sweats, and/or chills
 - Severe headache that is completely relieved when laying flat.
- **No driving 24-48 hours**

Any questions, comments, or concerns should be addressed with the staff prior to the discogram. You may contact the office at 518-487-4093, 518-487-4095.