

LUMBAR DISCOGRAM

A discogram is a test to determine if one or more of the discs in the spine are the source of pain. A special dye is injected into the discs to examine the structure of the disc and determine if this increase in pressure reproduces the patient's exact pain pattern. To ensure proper placement of the dye, the procedure is performed under fluoroscopic imaging, a low dose type x-ray.

The results are then used to determine if more advanced treatment is appropriate for the patient. The discogram is not a treatment for pain and should not be performed unless the patient is seriously considering surgery or a similar treatment.

These procedures are performed in the surgery center. The patient will be asked to change into a hospital gown. An IV will be started for medications and safety. A brief pre-procedure history and physical examination are performed. All patient medications taken at home will be reviewed to ensure there are no contraindications to the procedure and that the patient has complied with pre-procedure instructions. The patient will be required to have a complete list of all medication normally taken at home. The patient is then transported to the procedure room and positioned on an x-ray table. The skin will then be cleaned with a sterile soap and draped in a sterile fashion. The skin over the injection target site is then anesthetized with a local anesthetic. Fluoroscopy is then used to guide a needle into the proper location. Contrast dye is administered (unless the patient has allergies to iodine) to confirm placement and the medication is slowly injected. Once the procedure is completed, the patient returns to the recovery area for approximately 30 minutes to rest.

The entire process for check-in, preparation, recovery and checkout will take approximately 2 hours. The procedure itself generally lasts for 30 to 60 minutes, but the rest of the time is necessary to ensure a safe, efficacious procedure. During the injection, pain is sometimes increased temporarily.

Every medical procedure, no matter how minor, contains some risks. Anytime, a needle is placed into the body there is a risk of tissue injury, infection and bleeding. If this occurs near the spine, it can result in nerve damage. Although extremely rare, nerve damage and death have occurred following spine injections. Injections near the spine also risk puncturing the dura and can result in headaches, which can easily be treated. More common risks include a temporary increase in pain, local tenderness after the injection and allergic reactions to the medications.