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What you can expect

By Mayo Clinic Staff

The total time for the test is about three hours. The discogram itself takes about 30 minutes. You'll be able to go home later that same day.



Discogram injection



Discogram images

During a discogram

A discogram is performed in a clinic or hospital room that has imaging equipment. You are awake during the procedure, but your doctor may give you a sedative through a vein to help you relax. You may also receive antibiotics to help prevent infection.

During the procedure, you lie on a table on your abdomen. After cleaning your skin, your doctor may inject a numbing medicine to decrease pain caused by the insertion of the discography needles.

Your doctor will use an imaging technique (fluoroscopy) that enables him or her to watch as the needle enters your body. Fluoroscopy allows more precise and safer placement of the needle into the center of the disk to be examined. A contrast dye is then injected into the disk, and an X-ray or CT scan is taken to see if the dye spreads.

If the dye stays in the center of the disk, the disk is normal. If the dye spreads outside the center of the disk, the disk has undergone some wear-and-tear change. These changes may or may not be the cause of your pain.

Typically, if a disk is causing your back pain, you will feel pain during the injection that's similar to the back pain you have daily. If a disk is normal, there's little pain during injection. During discography, you will be asked to rate your pain.

After a discogram

You remain in the procedure room for approximately 30 minutes to one hour for observation. Someone will need to drive you home.

It is normal to have some pain at the injection site or in the low back for several hours after the procedure. You will need to keep your back dry for 24 hours after the procedure. If you develop severe back pain or you develop a fever one to two weeks after the procedure, call your doctor right away.

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