

## Discogram

### WHAT IS AN DISCOGRAM?

A discogram is an interventional radiology procedure typically performed to help diagnose the cause of back pain and to guide the treatment of abnormal discs. The procedure also may be performed prior to surgery to help identify discs that need to be treated or removed. Often doctors rely on other tests, such as MRI and CT scanning, to supply this information, in place of a discogram.

Intervertebral discs are sponge-like cushions between the vertebrae of the spine. Discs act as a sort of shock absorber for the spine and help provide flexibility. When discs bulge or rupture, they may press on the nerves of the spinal column and cause pain or weakness.

In a discogram, contrast media (x-ray dye) is injected into the center of one or more spinal discs using fluoroscopy (an x-ray 'movie') as a guide. This injection may temporarily reproduce the patient's back pain symptoms. A CT scan is then performed of the areas that have been injected.

### HOW IS A DISCOGRAM PERFORMED?

You will be asked to lie on your side on the fluoroscopy table. The skin on the back is then cleaned with antiseptic and the area is covered with a sterile drape.

Local anaesthetic is injected to numb the skin of the back. A fine needle is then passed into the disc to be examined, the position of the needle is checked to assess its position then a small amount of contrast media is injected.

During the procedure you may be asked to describe your pain in terms of location and severity. If the injected disc is the source of your back pain, you may feel pain similar to what you experience on a day-to-day basis. The process may be repeated for additional discs.

After the injections are complete, the needle is removed and a CT scan is performed to further analyse the injected discs. When contrast material spreads outside a disc, it may indicate that there are fissures in the outer ring of the disc.

**The examination itself takes approximately 30-60 minutes depending on how many discs are examined, but you will be monitored after the procedure for 1-2 hours.**

### BEFORE A DISCOGRAM:

- You will be asked to have nothing to eat or drink for 4 hours before the procedure.
- You will be given a prescription for antibiotics to fill and take as prescribed.
- You will be asked to contact our nurse if you are on any anticoagulants such as Warfarin, or if you are a diabetic.
- Aspirin/Cartia is stopped 5 days prior to your appointment.
- You may take all other usual medications on the morning of your appointment.
- Please bring any related prior imaging with you.

### AFTER A DISCOGRAM:

- You may be monitored in the radiology department for up to 2 hours after the procedure, so please allow for this.
- If you have been given sedation before the procedure, do not drive or operate any heavy machinery for 24 hours.
- It is important you bring someone with you who can drive you home.

## Discogram CONTINUED

- You will need to rest for the remainder of the day.
- You may experience some discomfort and tightness around the area of examination.
- Continue to take any pain relief that has been described by your doctor.
- Although it is unlikely that you will develop any infection at the site of the injection, we ask you to monitor it for any signs of redness, inflammation or increase in pain.
- **If inflammation or redness does occur, or you have any concerns, please contact your GP, referring doctor or go to your local White Cross Medical Centre.**