



Anatomy

The lumbar spine is a segment of 5 vertebrae and discs which make up most of your lower back. Low back pain can occur from many structures and a thorough diagnosis is important.

Description

Lumbar disc pain results from an injury to the discs between the lumbar vertebrae in the lower back. The lumbar discs are cartilage 'Pads' that act as shock absorbers for the spine. They have a "gel" like centre that allows shock absorption and an outer annulus or "onion ring" like structure to provide strength and durability. Over a period of time, degeneration can occur resulting in pressure on a spinal nerve and symptoms such as pins and needles, numbness and pain down the leg. The discs themselves can also send dull pain around the base of your spine without any radiating symptoms.

Causes

Lumbar disc pain is usually the result of wear and tear to the disc. These are often referred to as "degenerative changes" in x-rays or CT scans. A lumbar disc has a limited nerve supply and therefore, damage can occur in the disc with little pain or stiffness being felt. Common causes are:

- Poor lifting technique
- Poor sitting or driving posture
- Bending and twisting actions

Symptoms experienced

- Ache into centre(or to one side) of the back and or leg
- Painful coughing or sneezing
- Aggravated symptoms when bending or sitting
- Increases pain or stiffness upon waking

Note: Pins and needles or numbness may indicate a more severe injury and should be investigated by your doctor and appropriate scans.



Treatment

The most important thing to remember is to ***avoid aggravating activities***. Positions that place extra stresses on the low back should be avoided to limit further damage to the injured disc and to aid in the disc healing.

- Limit sitting to 10 mins at a time – preferably in a straight backed chair, rather than a soft couch or sofa.
- In the first 5-10 days anti-inflammatory medications maybe of benefit, so discuss these with your doctor and/ or pharmacist.

Your physiotherapist may assist in your recovery using any of these techniques

- Soft tissue massage
- Lumbar mobilization
- Taping
- Strength and stretching exercises
- Deep abdominal retraining

A comprehensive rehabilitation guide for low back disc injuries is available via subscription at www.rehabonthenet.com. Please feel free to discuss any problems or queries with your physiotherapist or online at www.rehabonthenet.com.