

Is Your Back or Neck Pain a Herniated Disc?



**David Prior,
M.D., FAAOS**

For those suffering from persistent back or neck pain, a herniated disc could be to blame.

“The spine is made up of individual bones called vertebrae,” explained David Prior, M.D., FAAOS, a fellowship-trained orthopaedic spine surgeon affiliated with Salem Regional Medical Center (SRMC) and Salem Orthopaedic Surgery. “Some of the vertebrae are cushioned by soft, jellylike discs, which allow you to move your spine around and bend over.”

A herniated or ‘slipped’ disc is when all or part of a disc between two vertebrae starts slipping out of place, which can irritate nearby nerves and cause pain. While herniated discs can happen anywhere along the spine, they most often occur in the lower back or the neck.

“In addition to back and neck pain, people with herniated discs may experience pain, numbness and weakness in the arms or legs. Symptoms typically worsen with movement and get better with rest,” he said.

According to Dr. Prior, herniated discs are most often the result of natural, age-related wear and tear on the spine. Other risk factors for herniated discs include:

- Excess weight
- Repetitive motions for work, sports or hobbies
- Sudden strain from improper lifting or twisting
- Sedentary lifestyle
- A traumatic event, such as a fall
- Smoking

“Most herniated discs can be diagnosed through a physical exam to assess pain, muscle reflexes, sensation and muscle strength,” he said. “Your provider may also order imaging tests to confirm the presence of a herniated disc and provide a more detailed picture of its location on the spine.”

Herniated discs usually heal on their own within several days to weeks with at-home treatments; such as taking rest breaks throughout the day, not sitting for long periods of time, gentle stretching and avoiding activities that cause pain.

“Your provider may also prescribe physical therapy or medication to help relieve the pain,” Dr. Prior added. “Surgery is rarely needed to treat a herniated disc, but may be an option if non-invasive therapies don’t relieve your symptoms.”

David Prior, M.D., FAAOS, sees patients at Salem Orthopaedic Surgery, located inside Salem Regional Medical Center at 1995 East State Street in Salem. Appointments with Dr. Prior can be scheduled by calling 330-332-7840.