

**Kaiser Permanente San Jose Medical Center
Spinal Diagnostic and Pain Services
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**Cervical, Thoracic, and Lumbar Discography
Patient Information**

What are the discs?

The discs are soft, cushion-like pads that separate the hard vertebral bones in your spine. A disc may be painful when it bulges, herniates, tears or degenerates and may cause pain in your neck, mid-back, low back and/or arms, chest wall, abdomen and legs. Other structures in your spine may also cause similar pain such as the muscles, joints and nerves. Usually, we have first determined that these other structures are not your sole pain source (through history and physical examination, review of x-rays, CT/MRI, and or other diagnostic injection procedures such as facet and sacroiliac joint injections and nerve root blocks) before performing discography.

What is discography and why is it helpful?

Discography confirms or denies the disc(s) as the source of your pain. It is a relatively simple procedure that uses a small needle to inject contrast dye into your disc. MRI and CT scans only demonstrate anatomy and cannot absolutely prove your pain source. In many instances, the discs may be abnormal on MRI or CT scans but not be a source of pain. Only discography, which is a functional test, can tell if the disc itself is a source of your pain. Therefore, discography is done to identify painful disc(s) and help the surgeon plan the correct surgery or avoid surgery that may not be beneficial. Discography is usually done only if you think your pain is significant enough for you to consider surgery or the IDET procedure.

What will happen to me during the procedure?

An IV will be started so that antibiotics (to prevent infection) and relaxation medicine can be given. You will be positioned on your back for cervical discography, and on your belly for thoracic and lumbar discography. Your skin will be well cleaned and draped to create a sterile working area. Next the physician will numb your skin with some anesthetic medicine. After your skin has been numbed, the physician will use x-ray guidance to direct a small needle into your disc. You may feel temporary discomfort as the needle passes through the muscles or near a nerve root. The physician will repeat this at several adjoining disc levels. Once the needles are placed in their proper locations, a small amount of contrast dye will be injected into each disc. If a disc is the source of your usual pain the injection will temporarily reproduce your symptoms. If a disc is not the source of your pain then the injection will not reproduce your symptoms or cause any discomfort.

What will happen to me after the procedure?

Immediately after the procedure some patients may be sent for a CT scan. If the physician determines that you will need a CT scan then you will be taken to the radiology department for the imaging study immediately following the procedure. If a CT scan is not needed then you will be observed for 30 to 45 minutes after the procedure prior to going home. You may not drive for eight hours following the procedure. You will be given, if desired, a prescription for pain medication for 2-3 days following the procedure when your muscles may be sore.

General Pre/Post Procedure Instructions

You should refrain from eating for 6 hours prior to the procedure. Liquids are fine and can be continued. If you are an insulin dependent diabetic you will need to adjust your insulin accordingly. Take your routine medications before the procedure (such as high blood pressure and diabetes medications) except stop aspirin 7 days before the procedure. These medicines may be re-started the day after the procedure. You may take your regular pain medicine as needed before/after the procedure. If you are on coumadin (Warfarin), heparin, lovenox, plavix, or ticlid you must notify our office so that the timing of stopping these medicines can be explained. If you are on antibiotics please notify our office, we may postpone the procedure until you have finished the medicine. If you have an active infection or fever we will not perform the procedure. If you are a woman of childbearing age and you know or suspect that you may be pregnant, we will not perform the procedure. You will be in the hospital for 2 to 3 hours even though you will see the physician for only 20 to 30 minutes. **You will need to bring a driver with you.** You may return to your current level of activities the next day, including return to work.

Place of Procedure

The discography will be performed at the Kaiser San Jose Pain Procedures Suite which is located in Ambulatory Surgery Center Building.