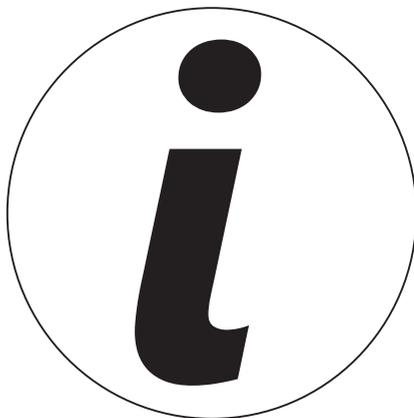


About discograms



Information for patients

Radiology



PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



What is a discogram?

Discogram or diagnostic discography is an X-ray procedure that can help to determine the source of your lower back or leg pain. This procedure is used to determine if a degenerative or worn out disc is the cause of your back pain, and to help decide which patients are likely to benefit from an operation. The procedure will help determine the course of your treatment.

Why do I need it?

If you have been suffering from severe back or leg pain, this may be due to a worn out disc but it is not always very easy to tell which part of your spine is causing you this pain. You may have already had an MRI or CT scan but because these investigations have not determined for definite where your pain is coming from, your doctor has asked us to try to find out which part of your back is affected.

Does it hurt?

The discogram is a test, not a treatment. However, the radiologist will inject some local anaesthetic and dye into the disc which may decrease your pain for 6-8 hours after the procedure.

Part of the procedure is to try to recreate your back pain which will show us where the trouble is, so the procedure is likely to be uncomfortable at times. We need you to tell us when the pain is bad.

Are there any risks?

There are infrequent risks involved in having a discogram, which include:

Disc space infection is a rare (1:200 to 1:10,000) but serious complication.

Nerve damage: very rarely the nerves at the site of the injection may be damaged, causing weakness, numbness or pain. Usually this effect will only last for a few hours, and will disappear after the local anaesthetic has worn off. Occasionally the side-effect may be prolonged.

Very rarely patients may have an **allergic reaction** to the dye. Please tell your doctor if you have a known allergy to X-ray dye, or any other allergies.

Discograms are undertaken using x-ray guidance. The typical dose of **X-rays** for this procedure is very low, and not much greater than the normal dose that we all receive from the background radiation all around us.

This procedure is a very good diagnostic test. However, occasionally the procedure does not show small changes well and therefore the radiologist may not be able to see and report all changes. In these circumstances you may need further investigations and this will be discussed with you by your doctor.

Where and by whom is the procedure done?

The procedure is done in the radiology (X-ray) department in one of the fluoroscopy rooms. The test is performed by a consultant radiologist, who is a doctor that specialises in X-ray procedures.

What should I do if I suspect I may be pregnant or I am still able to have children?

This test is not carried out on pregnant women.

If you are, or suspect that you are, pregnant please telephone the department and discuss this with one of the nursing staff.

Women who are still having periods should have this procedure during the 10 days following the start of your menstrual period (this includes the time that you are menstruating). A suitable appointment will be negotiated with you.

What do I need to do to prepare for the procedure?

You will be admitted to one of the hospital wards about 3 - 4 hours before you come for your discogram and asked not to eat or drink for 3 hours before your procedure. However, you should still take your usual medications, including any pain medication, before the procedure.

The ward staff will give you some intravenous antibiotics via a drip in your arm before you come to the radiology department. The antibiotics will help to reduce the risk of disc infection following the procedure.

You should inform the ward staff if you are allergic to anything, including any antibiotics. In addition you should mention if you are taking any medication to thin your blood, such as Warfarin.

You will be asked to put on a theatre gown before you come to the radiology department so that we can get easy access to your lower back. The radiology department will send a porter to the ward and bring you to the department on your hospital bed.

What happens when I arrive in the radiology department?

When you arrive in the department one of the nursing staff will collect you from the waiting area and take you into the special X-ray room called a fluoroscopy room.

The consultant radiologist, who is a doctor that specialises in X-ray examinations, will check all of your details and explain the procedure to you; he will then ask you to sign a consent form. The nurse will assist you to get into the correct position on the X-ray bed and will stay with

you throughout the procedure so that he or she can help you and explain things as they happen.

What happens during the procedure?

After injecting local anaesthetic into your skin and muscles the consultant radiologist will use an X-ray machine or 'fluoroscopy' to place a fine needle into the disc between the bones of your lower back. Your doctor will then inject a special dye, or 'contrast', into the disc using X-ray guidance. At the time of injection there is usually some pain which may be similar to or different to your usual pain. Both results are equally important, and you must be as honest as possible when comparing the pain from the discogram to your usual pain. The procedure takes approximately 40 minutes.

The test itself may be painful, but you need to be awake and aware in order to tell your doctor what kind of pain is generated by the injection. A small dressing or plaster is applied to the needle wound.

What happens after the procedure?

Once the procedure is finished, we will check your blood pressure and pulse before returning you to your ward. We also make sure that you have full sensation in your legs. On the ward the nurses should check your needle wound on your back, and record your blood pressure, pulse and temperature again. If the results of these checks are normal then you will be allowed to go home once you have passed water and you feel fit enough.

It is quite common to have some lower back pain or discomfort after the procedure for a few days. At home you should rest for about 24 hours before resuming your normal routine. You can start eating and drinking again as normal and take your usual painkiller.

Is there anything to look out for when I go home?

It is extremely rare to have any problems once you have gone home. However, if you do feel unwell with symptoms such as:

- an increase in back pain
- difficulty passing water or stool
- numbness in your legs
- feeling feverish or generally unwell

you should immediately consult your GP or your local Accident and Emergency department and explain that you have had this procedure.

When and how will I get my results?

Before you leave hospital you will be given a simple questionnaire to fill in. This should be completed 12 hours after the procedure and will ask you to assess whether your back and/or leg pain has changed during these hours. Please send this back to the X-ray department the day after the procedure; the address is on the form.

Once you have returned the questionnaire your consultant radiologist will write a report and send it to your surgeon within a few days. You should have an appointment booked with your surgeon at which you can discuss the results. If you do not have an appointment to see your surgeon, his or her secretary will send one out to you.

Where can I find more information about discograms?

More information about radiology is available from the Royal College of Radiologists' website on:

- **<https://www.rcr.ac.uk/>**

Further information on discography is available at:

- **www.spineuniverse.com/**

You can telephone the Radiology department and speak to one of the staff on:

- **0114 226 8000**



Produced with support from Sheffield Hospitals Charity
Working together we can help local patients feel even better

To donate visit

www.sheffieldhospitalscharity.org.uk Registered Charity No 1169762



Yes I donate
ORGAN DONATION

**Alternative formats can be available on request.
Please email: alternativeformats@sth.nhs.uk**

© Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust 2019

Re-use of all or any part of this document is governed by copyright and the "Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005"
SI 2005 No.1515. Information on re-use can be obtained from the Information Governance Department, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals.
Email infogov@sth.nhs.uk