

Overview

If you experience persistent back pain that has not responded to conservative treatments, you may be a candidate for provocation discography. **Provocation discography** is a diagnostic procedure performed under fluoroscopic (X-ray) guidance to determine if a particular intervertebral disc is the source of a patient's back pain. Discography is an outpatient procedure in which a needle is used to access the center of the intervertebral disc, called the nucleus pulposus. A small volume of contrast dye is then injected in order to stimulate the disc. Simultaneously, the patient is questioned as to whether the disc stimulation reproduces their usual back pain. This process is then repeated on multiple discs until all of the pertinent information has been gathered. After the procedure, a spinal CT scan is immediately obtained in order to better visualize the stimulated discs and assess for a tear in the intervertebral disc, known as an annular fissure. A stimulated disc found to be painful after meeting strict diagnostic criteria is known as internal disc disruption syndrome (IDD) and is the most common cause of chronic low back pain in young adults.

Provocation discography is NOT a treatment; it is utilized strictly as a diagnostic tool to confirm or refute whether the disc under investigation reproduces some or all of your usual pain. You should not expect ANY therapeutic pain relief from this procedure; in fact, if your doctor stimulates a painful disc, you can expect to experience a flare up or transient worsening of your usual back pain. However, this normally resolves within a few days. Importantly, when physiologically normal, non-painful discs are properly stimulated, they do not cause pain.

What should I expect?

- Your physician will discuss with you and determine which and how many discs will be tested; however, you can expect that 3–4 discs will be evaluated.
- You will need a driver to and from the procedure.
- The procedure will typically last approximately 45–60 minutes.
- You will receive IV antibiotics prior to the procedure.
- Your physician will greet you and answer any final questions before the procedure.
- As you and your doctor must communicate clearly throughout the procedure, sedation is NOT recommended and will not be administered prior to or during the procedure.
- After the completion of the procedure, you will undergo a CT scan of your spine to complete the test.
- If you experience increased pain after your procedure, please take your regularly prescribed pain medications as this should resolve within a few days.

In order to assure accurate needle placement, all injections are performed under X-ray guidance called fluoroscopy. Substances injected during the procedure include local anesthetics and contrast dye.

Please report any known allergy or adverse reaction to any of these substances to a member of the Spine Center team.



How should I prepare for my injection?

- If you have a fever or flu-like symptoms or an infection requiring antibiotics on the day of your procedure, please call the office (585) 723-7705 to discuss this with one of our nurses.
- If you are pregnant, please notify physician as special instructions will be given.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing.
- It is okay to eat a light meal prior to your procedure.
- Please take all your medications on the day of the procedure unless you have been instructed otherwise.
- Please bring a list of your current medications and dosages with you.
- Plan to spend approximately 1.5 hours at the Spine Center.
- If you have allergies to local anesthetic, steroids, injection dye (CT scan dye) or shellfish, please notify the physician prior to your procedure.

What happens on procedure day?

- You will be asked to arrive 60 minutes prior to your appointment.
- You will be asked to change into a patient gown.
- The nurse will take your vital signs and medication history.
- The physician will see you briefly to answer questions directly related to the procedure and to obtain your signature on the consent form.
- You will be observed for a period of time following the procedure.
- Upon your departure, you will be provided with additional written instructions.
- Please reserve detailed questions about your condition and medications for your follow-up visit with your Spine Center physician one week later.

What are the potential complications?

Your physician will review these in detail before your injection and have you sign a consent form. If you have any additional questions about potential risk factors, a member of our team will be happy to discuss them with you.

When should I call the Spine Center after an injection?

- A temperature of 100 degrees or more.
- Loss of bowel or bladder control.
- Loss of motor function in arms or legs.
- Pain that is severe or worsening.
- Headache that increases with standing or sitting and is relieved upon laying down.