



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.™

Helping Hand™

Health Education for Patients and Families

Sports Medicine: Herniated Disc

A herniated disc is a condition that affects the spine. A disc has a tough outside shell and jelly-like center. It functions like a cushion and shock absorber between the bones of the spine (vertebrae). A herniated disc occurs when the jelly-like contents of the disc leak out. Sometimes the herniated disc can push on the nearby spinal cord or nerves. This most commonly occurs in the lower back but can sometimes happen in the neck and mid-back.

Signs and symptoms

- pain in the back usually on one side
- pain, numbness or weakness affecting one arm or leg
- muscle spasms of the back muscles
- pain that gets worse with movement or with sneezing, coughing or laughing
- shrinking of the affected muscles (atrophy)

Increased risk

- obesity
- poor physical conditioning (strength and flexibility)
- family history of back pain or disc disorders
- poor warm-up before practice or play
- any sport where movement causes downward or twisting pressure on the spine
- poor lifting techniques

Treatment

- Medicine
 - Anti-inflammatory medicines, such as ibuprofen (Motrin® or Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®) may be suggested. Take these as directed by your health care provider.
 - Other minor pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®).

- Oral steroids may be prescribed to reduce pain and swelling.
- Use of cold and heat
 - Cold should be applied for 10 to 15 minutes every 2 to 3 hours for swelling and after any activity that makes symptoms worse. Use ice packs or an ice massage.
 - Heat may be used before stretching and strengthening activities prescribed by your health care provider or athletic trainer. Use a heat pack or warm soak. Apply for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Exercises
 - Exercises to improve range of motion, strength and flexibility may be recommended. These can be done at home but often a referral to a physical therapist or athletic trainer may be prescribed by your health care provider.
- Bracing
 - Bracing may be used to help reduce short-term pain and provide support.
- Injections
 - Steroid injections may be used to decrease pain if other treatment does not help.
- Surgery
 - Patients with loss of bowel or bladder function, on-going pain, numbness, weakness or paralysis may need surgery.

How to prevent

- Do correct warm-up and stretching before practice or competition.
- Avoid activities that require twisting of the body under uncontrolled conditions.
- Maintain proper cardiovascular conditioning, core strength, lower body flexibility and a healthy body weight.
- Sit or lift items properly.

When to call the health care provider

Call your health care provider or the **Sports Medicine team** at (614) 355-6000 if:

- symptoms get worse after 2 to 4 weeks, even with treatment
- you have loss of bowel or bladder function
- new, unexplained symptoms develop

To schedule an appointment with Sports Medicine, visit [NationwideChildrens.org/SportsMedicineScheduling](https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/sports-medicine-scheduling) or scan this code with your camera phone.

