

Why Are Herniated Disks a Cause for Concern?

Within the scope of Personal Injury Law we see an endless list of injuries that affect our clients and have caused irreparable harm, making their daily lives impossible to live freely. From medical malpractice to car and motorcycle accident-related injuries, there isn't one specific injury that's more painful than the next. Each injury our clients suffer through accidents or malpractice is unique and causes innumerable symptoms, sometimes leaving them bed or wheelchair bound for extended periods of time.

One injury that's not discussed frequently but causes a great deal of pain for accident victims, is what's known as a **herniated disk**. Within this Shaked Law Blog article we'll provide the information you need to fully understand the painful reality of this type of injury and the lengths an accident victim may have to go to achieve pain relief. From prescription pain medication to undergoing surgical procedures to relieve symptoms, those who have suffered a back injury can attest to the fact it's not only extremely painful but prevents them from living fully.

A herniated disk is not just "back pain". In severe cases, it can be as painful as a spinal cord injury and may require extensive surgery to repair. Usually, with proper medical attention the herniated disk can be treated, and the patient will feel some pain relief. However, the recovery is lengthy, and a large percentage of sufferers never experience total relief of their symptoms.

In the case of workers who suffer a herniated disc, they may find themselves facing lost wages and being forced to survive on workman's compensation benefits throughout their recovery.

More than back pain

When doctors reference a patient having a "herniated disk", it's difficult to visualize exactly what that means. Our vertebrae (bones of the spine) are protected by "rubbery" or "jelly-like" cushions between each one. A herniated disk can be in reference to a problem with one of those "jelly-like" cushions that act as a shock absorber for our spine. A herniation can cause irritation to the spinal nerves which can in turn cause a great deal of pain. However, pain isn't the only symptom found in herniated disk injuries.

Other symptoms of herniated disk can include but are not limited to:

- **Pain in the extremities:** if you've herniated a disk in your lower back (lumbar region) you typically feel intense, burning pain in your buttocks, calf, thigh, or all three. In

extreme cases, the feet may become involved as well. However, if you've herniated a disk in your neck (cervical spine), you'll most likely suffer pain in the shoulders and arms. This pain can be described as "shooting" and can lessen or worsen when changing positions.

- **Numbness or a tingling sensation in the hands or feet:** this is a common symptom of a herniated disk; numbness or tingling in the affected extremities can be uncomfortable and is caused by impingement or inflammation of the affected nerves.
- **Muscle weakness:** nerves provide strength to muscles, and therefore when they become inflamed by a herniated disk injury, you may suffer muscle weakness and atrophy (deterioration of muscle). Those affected by muscle weakness due to a herniated disk may be at-risk for falling and must take care when using stairs or attempting to stand up or perform other tasks such as getting in or out of the bathtub.

Causes of herniated disk injuries are widespread

Mayo Clinic states that "disk herniation is most often the result of a gradual, aging-related wear and tear called disk degeneration". It can be inferred from this medical evidence that herniated disks are part of the normal aging process and are not always a cause for concern. A medical professional can advise a patient with certainty after diagnostic imaging such as an MRI or CT scan whether or not further medical intervention may be required.

Despite disk degeneration being part and parcel of the aging process, there are several factors that put a percentage of the population at a higher risk for sustaining this type of injury than others. While most people can't remember exactly how they sustained their back injury, the risk factors that physicians often look at are:

- **Excess weight gain:** being overweight (coupled with lack of exercise) can put extra stress on the disks of the lumbar region of the spine, causing a higher risk for herniation. Usually, this can be relieved with proper exercise or targeted physical therapy intended to relieve the pressure on the lower spine.
- **Occupational hazards:** the percentage of the population with physically demanding jobs are at the highest risk for disk herniation. Jobs that require heavy lifting, pushing, pulling, and bending all come with the risk of a widespread array of spine-related injuries. Rarely, work related accidents that cause a direct hit to the spine can cause herniated disks and other severe spinal injuries.
- **Hereditary and genetic factors:** heredity and genetics play a role in spinal injuries, leaving people more susceptible to herniated disks and other associated co-morbidities. In extremely rare cases, a form of auto-immune (inflammatory) arthritis called Ankylosing Spondylitis can cause degeneration and "bulging" disks in the spine, leading to herniation if no medical intervention is sought. This rare genetic illness is

caused by a marker known as "HLA-B27" and can be ruled out with an x-ray and a routine blood test if the physician feels the patient is at-risk for it.

Be aware of the complications

While your spinal cord doesn't extend into the lumbar region, just below the waist is where the spinal cord veers off into a group of nerve roots ("cauda equina"). If a disk herniation is severe enough, it may compress these nerve roots and emergency surgery may be required for decompression. If you experience worsening weakness or paralysis, contact your physician immediately or go straight to the emergency room.

Worsening symptoms that should not be ignored include but are not limited to:

- Pain, weakness, muscle atrophy in affected extremities
- **Bowel or bladder dysfunction:** people who experience a level of paralysis with a herniated disk may find their bladder or bowel control is lessened due to compression of the nerve roots in the spine. Difficulty or inability to urinate may also be a symptom that requires emergency medical attention.
- **Saddle anesthesia:** this phenomenon is known for its progressive loss of function and affects the areas of the body that one uses when sitting on a "saddle"—inner thighs, the area around the buttocks, and the back of the legs.

***Disclaimer:** Any symptoms you experience should always be discussed with a licensed medical professional, and one should never rely on articles found via the internet when making important medical decisions. This article is not intended to replace the advice of a doctor.*

Contact us to schedule a complimentary consultation. There's no obligation. Take the first step and call today: (877). 529-0080