

# The Cause and Treatment of Back and Disk Injuries Dr. Stephanie Zarins DC

Unlike injuries such as fractures or dislocations, most disk herniations do not occur by accident, but rather gradually develop through cumulative degenerative processes. Thus, an important thing to remember is that back surgery is not a permanent solution for the condition in most cases. Unless the cause of disk injury is addressed, there is a great risk of developing another disk herniation in another location.



What are the causes of disk herniations? There is a combination of both well-known and lesser-known factors involved; biomechanical and emotional stress.

**Hidden cause of disk injury** : Everyone knows that a variety of biomechanical stresses such as standing and walking with poor posture, sitting for long periods, and heavy lifting can cause back problems.

Another less known cause of disk injury is emotional stress. The involvement of emotional stress causing disk degeneration or herniation is unrecognized by most back specialists; however a number of back pain patients can recall remarkable stressful periods in their life just before the onset of back pain. Prolonged emotional stress creates a sympathetic dominant state in the autonomic nervous system and leads to decreased blood flow to most of the organs, muscles and peripheral tissues. When blood flow to the lumbar muscles is decreased, the muscles become tight, lose flexibility, and are easily fatigued.

**Non-surgical natural approach for disk injury** : Our treatment approach addresses all aspects of back problems both biomechanical and psycho-emotional using acupuncture, soft tissue manipulation and biofeedback. Acupuncture stimulation to the related localized muscles is helpful to correct distortion and biomechanical imbalances. Acupuncture is also applied to the whole body and is utilized to correct imbalance in the autonomic nervous system. The aim in most cases is to decrease excessive sympathetic activation and to enhance the parasympathetic system to create the desirable relaxation response. Since it is almost impossible to avoid stress in this day and age, we should rather focus on how to recover quickly from stress in order to avoid the harmful consequences of prolonged stress. Heart rate variability biofeedback technique is often combined with acupuncture to enhance patients' self regulation skills for this purpose.



**What is the Difference between Acupuncture and Pain Medication?** Non-steroidal anti inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) have several well-known potential detrimental effects in your system such as gastric irritation and liver damage while acupuncture has virtually no side-effects. In terms of the action on your muscle and joint pain, acupuncture works in a completely different manner than medication does.

Most pain-relief and anti-inflammatory medications provide excellent short-term pain-relief by blocking the production of pain-causing substances called prostaglandins. In addition to inducing pain, however, prostaglandins are vasodilators which help enhance circulation. By inhibiting the production of prostaglandins, there will be decreased sensitivity to pain but blood supply to the muscles and joints will also be decreased, thus creating problems and prolonging true recovery.

Our acupuncture technique, however, produces the complete opposite effect. Except in a few very acute cases, we attempt to enhance blood circulation, especially in the area that there is pain or discomfort. This desired action can be achieved by regulating the autonomic nervous system (which is responsible for internal organ system functioning, regulation of blood circulation, and production of relaxation effects) using specific acupuncture techniques. When circulation in the tissue improves, muscle relaxation occurs and immediate pain reduction follows in many cases. In some other cases, however, when circulation improves, the pain in the affected area occasionally intensifies, and is then followed by repair of tissue and muscle relaxation.

Proper circulation in the tissue is important not only for blood to nourish the tissue but also in enhancing the elimination of muscle fatigue and pain-causing substances (e.g., lactic acid) thus resulting in healthy tissues. On the other hand, tight muscles with poor circulation are fatigued easily and are more prone to injury.



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