

Benign Spine Disease

Herniated Disc

A **herniated disc**, also called a ruptured disc, slipped disc, extruded disc and other terms, occurs when there is a tear in the annulus fibrosis and a chunk of the nucleus pushes out of the disc (Figure 1). The piece of the nucleus that pushes out is called a herniated disc fragment. The disc fragment causes pain and neurological problems due to compression of a nerve root, spinal cord or cauda equina.

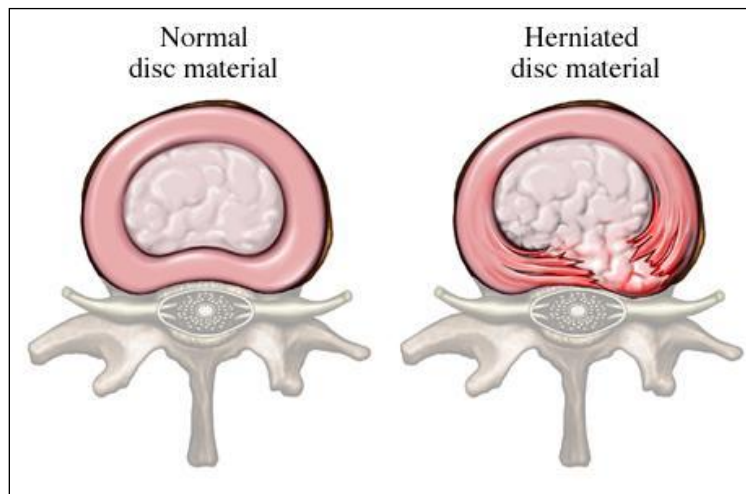


Figure 1: Cross sections of normal and herniated discs.

A herniated disc is sometimes compared to a jelly doughnut. The jelly is the nucleus and the doughnut is the annulus. The hole in the side of the doughnut is like a tear in the annulus. When you push on the doughnut, the jelly comes out like a herniated disc fragment. It should be noted, however, that the nucleus, which is a form of cartilage, is in fact fairly firm.