

SLIPPED DISC

Knowing how your body works will help you understand why injuries happen and how to stay healthy. The spine is made up of stacked bones called vertebrae. They are arranged in three natural curves to keep your body supported. Strong, flexible muscles and ligaments help maintain these curves. In between each of the bones of the spine are soft cushions called discs that act as shock absorbers. The nerves exit between the vertebrae and branch out to your body. Each disc has a spongy center and a tough outer ring. There is a constant exchange of fluids in and out of the discs. While we sleep the discs fill with fluid. During the day with standing and sitting, the fluid is pushed out. That is why we are shorter at the end of the day. How we move during the day and especially our posture affects the size, shape, flexibility and health of our discs.

Even though that is what we call it, discs do not slip out or fall out. They tear, bulge and rupture. This allows the inside portion of the disc to leak out and put pressure on nearby nerves. This results in weakening the rest of your back. Pain in the back and legs as well as numbness may result. A sequence of rest, movement, ice and exercise should get you through this acute phase. In some severe cases, surgery is required to decrease pressure on the spinal cord. To prevent further injury, understand that poor disc health usually starts with poor posture:

- * weak or tight muscles that do not support the back's normal curves,
- * slouching when sitting or standing, and
- * incorrect lifting.

Over time, poor posture will cause our discs to wear out early. Just like a sponge, they wring out and cannot do their job. When the discs are not working or break, we can have any number of back problems. You can prevent and even correct these problems:

- * Stay in shape. A strong, flexible body will hold good posture easily and longer.
- * Learn to lift correctly. Do not stress your back.
- * Do not smoke. It decreases fluids to your discs so they injure sooner and take longer to heal.
- * Keep your weight down.