

Patient information from BMJ

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Slipped disk: questions to ask your doctor

If you have a slipped disk, one of the disks in your spine has been damaged and may be pressing on a nerve. It can be very painful, and sometimes cause other symptoms, such as numbness or "pins and needles" in your legs or feet.

Rarely, people get more serious symptoms, such as a feeling of weakness in both their legs, or numbness around their buttocks and genital region. This suggests their slipped disk is causing a serious problem, and they may need emergency surgery.

However, most people don't need emergency treatment. You may feel you can't do the things you usually do, but staying active may help you recover more quickly. If your back pain doesn't go away, surgery may help.

Here are some questions you may want to ask your doctor about a slipped disk.

If your doctor thinks you may have a slipped disk

- Is there a way you can be certain I have a slipped disk?
- Should I have an MRI scan or a CT scan? If so, when?
- Do I need to stay in bed or rest?
- Are there any activities that might make it worse?
- Is there anything that can help reduce the pain?
- How can I avoid getting pain again?
- Are there any exercises that can make my back stronger?
- Should I drive?

If you've had a scan that shows you have a slipped disk

- Does the disk that's damaged in my spine match the symptoms I have?
- How can you be sure the slipped disk is causing my symptoms?

If your doctor suggests surgery

- What is surgery likely to do for me?
- What are the risks?
- How long will it take for me to recover?
- When will I be able to go back to work?
- Which kind of surgery do you recommend?
- If I don't have surgery, what other treatments are there?
- What else can I do to make my back feel better?

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