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DISKOGRAM

A diskogram is a procedure by which a small needle is placed into the interior of the disc to check the structural integrity of the disc and to see if the disc is painful. The procedure is performed in a special x-ray room called a fluoroscopy room, in the hospital. The patient lies on his/her left side. The needle is inserted to the right of the mid line through the muscle in the back, so as to avoid the spinal cord and its contents. The procedure is done with the patient awake, although an IV will be started and medication given through the IV to control any discomfort that may occur. Because of the medication given, the patient should be accompanied to the procedure by someone who can drive them home following the diskogram. You should not eat or drink for 6 hours prior to the procedure.

The procedure, itself generally consists of two parts. Part one is the injection of water into the disc. A normal, healthy disk is completely painless, as it is water tight. If the disc is abnormal, the water injection may cause discomfort. You will be instructed to tell the physician the location and severity of the pain that ensues and whether or not it is the typical pain that you have been experiencing. Part two of the procedure consists of injecting dye into the disc. The dye shows up on the x-ray screen. A healthy disc has a normal, predictable dye pattern. If the disc is abnormal, the dye will proceed to flow in an abnormal manner which can be seen on the x-ray screen. Generally, standard x-rays are taken after insertion of the dye to make a permanent record of the findings seen on the x-ray screen. After all x-rays have been completed, the needles will be removed. Occasionally, a CT scan may be done after the needles are removed. You will be able to return to the outpatient area and go home at that time, if you have someone to drive you.

There are some risks involved with the procedure that you need to realize before making the decision to have a diskogram. There is always a chance of injuring a nerve by sticking a needle into the area of the spinal nerves. Another advantage of doing the procedure with you awake, is that if a nerve is irritated by the needle, you will note pain going into your leg and you should instruct the physician at that time so that he may change the direction of the needle. This is an infrequent problem. Other risks related to the procedure are the possibility of the disc being infected simply by sticking a needle into it. We take great precautions to prevent that, including surgical prep of the skin and the surgeon who performs the procedure scrubs his hands and wears the same surgical garb as if he were doing an operation. Other potential risks include the allergic reaction to one of the medications that is given, either for the pain or the diagnostic part of the procedure. You should let your physician know of any known drug allergies. There may be some increased discomfort after the procedure so do not plan on doing anything strenuous for at least 24 hours after it is completed. Usually the physician will tell you to make an appointment to return to the office several days after the procedure to discuss the results.

There will be three charges for your diskogram: the physician's charge for his services, the hospital charge for use of the special x-ray (fluoroscope) and a charge by the hospital for the use of the facility.