

LUMBAR DISC INJURY – AN OVERVIEW

BY THEA WALTER

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An increasing number of clients with spinal disc pathology are being referred to The Method® Pilates instructors for exercise rehabilitation. J.H. Pilates' exercises and equipment can be of great benefit to these clients, reducing their symptoms dramatically, especially when a good basis of knowledge is applied.

- Research has indicated 1% of the population will experience disc herniations per year. That equals 2.8 million herniations per year in the USA.
- More than 90% of those clients will improve with conservative, non-surgical treatment, primarily exercise.
- In fact surgery is indicated in only 2 to 4 % of all disc pathologies.
- Disc degeneration and pathology normally occurs between 40 and 50 years of age, however it can occur much earlier in persons who place excessive stress and strain on their spine through competitive sport and dance.
- Approximately 80% of adults experience low back pain at some point of their life, 40% of all low back pain is disc in origin.

ANATOMY

The inter vertebral discs (IVD) are situated between each of the bony vertebrae along the length of the spine. The inter vertebral disc is a complex spongy structure that consists of a gelatinous portion and an outer fibrous ring of tissue called the annulus. The inter vertebral disc functions to act as a shock absorber and permits movement of the spine. Although IVD are present throughout the spine most of the movement is seen in the neck and the lumbar back.

As a result of accumulated stress, poor posture, incorrect lifting techniques and constant bending and twisting the IVD progressively lose hydration and begin to degenerate. Advanced degeneration may produce herniated discs, which are prolapsed, extended or sequestered according to their severity. When the disc ruptures it is sequestered and may migrate into the spinal canal and can lead to irritation of the spinal cord and its nerve branches (*see diagram*). Tests, which confirm disc pathology, are CT scan, MRI and Myelogram.

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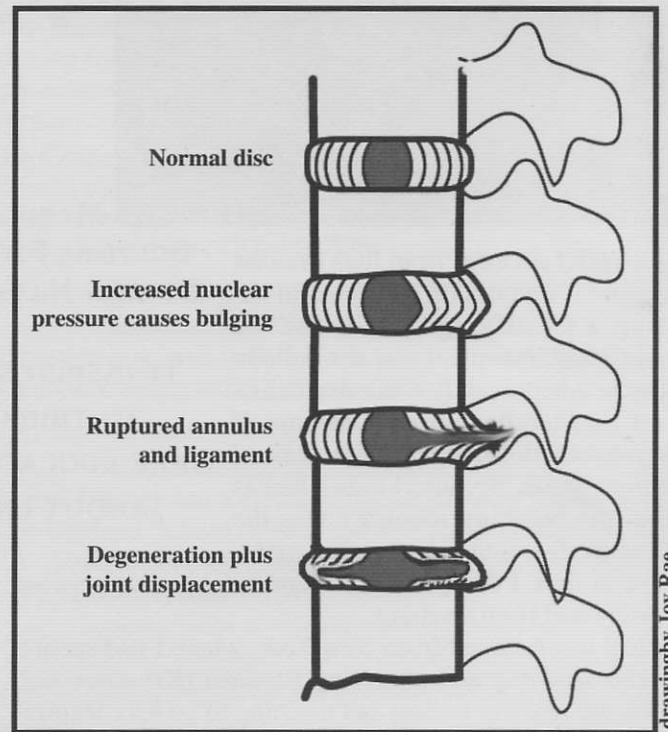


DIAGRAM OF DISC INJURY

drawing by Joy Rae

DISC INJURY MANAGEMENT

Since The Method® Pilates emphasizes neutral spine and recruitment of the deep stabilizing muscles of the lumbar-pelvic region it is an excellent way to rehabilitate those clients with disc injuries. A program designed for clients with disc injuries, which has a bias towards extension of the lumbar spine and neutral pelvis is the most successful. Flexion exercises are not introduced until symptoms have subsided and are *always* carefully monitored.