

Directorate of Neurosciences: Discogram

This leaflet provides information about the procedure called a discogram and aims to answer any questions you may have. If you have any further questions please ask a member of staff. Contact telephone numbers are provided over the page.

Why do I need this procedure?

The discogram is to help diagnose the source of the back pain you have been experiencing.

We will examine the structure of the intervertebral disc; which is the fibrous pad between the vertebrae.

About your appointment

- The discogram is done as a day case
- You could be in the hospital for up to six hours
- Please eat and drink as normal before the discogram, though a heavy meal is best avoided as it may make you feel uncomfortable during the procedure
- You should take your usual medications, however please also read the anticoagulant guideline information which accompanies this letter
- You must have someone who is able to collect you from the hospital and accompany you home
- You should not drive for 24 hours following the procedure
- You should not use public transport to go home so please arrange an alternative mode of transport

Do I need to contact the hospital about my appointment?

Should you need to change your appointment, or have any further questions or concerns, please telephone us on 0191 2825413 between 8.30am and 4.30pm

What happens when I arrive at the RVI?

- Please report to ward 17 which is situated on level 5 of the New Victoria Wing at the Royal Victoria Infirmary.
- You will be provided with a hospital gown to wear.
- You will be given an intramuscular injection of antibiotics prior to the procedure.
- The Neuroradiologist carrying out the procedure will visit you on the ward to explain what happens, answer your questions and ask you to sign a consent form.

How is the discogram performed?

- You will be escorted to the x-ray theatre and asked to lie face down on the x-ray couch
- The area to be injected will be cleaned with antiseptic solution
- The skin is numbed with local anaesthetic – this stings a little at first.
- Using x-ray guidance, a fine needle is inserted into the intravertebral disc, a small amount of x-ray contrast agent is injected and x-ray images are taken

What happens after the injection?

- Following the injection you will return to the ward on a bed and gradually be mobilised over the next hour
- The ward staff will discharge you home, with your escort

What are the side effects of the treatment?

The discogram may cause temporary discomfort in your back, similar to the back pain you have been experiencing

What are the risks and complications of the treatment?

- If you have an irritable disc, the discogram may cause a flare up of symptoms for a few days afterwards, but this ordinarily settles with simple anti-inflammatories and analgesics
- Some people experience discomfort and sometimes numbness down the leg during and after the procedure, but this usually settles fairly quickly
- Soreness or bruising where the injection was given. This usually settles in a few days
- Infection risks are minimised by the antibiotic injection and the sterile conditions used for the procedure
- Like all x-ray machines the one used during the discogram produces x-rays. Modern equipment is designed to keep the radiation dose to patients as low as possible. Your referring consultant will have decided that the benefit of having the discogram is greater than the risk of the small dose of radiation. If you think you may be pregnant it is very important that you tell the radiographer **before** the procedure

How do I get my results?

The consultant who referred you for the procedure will arrange for you to have an outpatient appointment to review the results

Who do I contact if I have any problems?

Between the hours of 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday please contact a nurse on ward 17 on 0191 2826017

Outside these times, please contact your GP

For enquiries about your appointment and procedure or to confirm you are coming by ambulance contact the Neuroradiology Secretaries on 0191 282 5413

Other contacts

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can offer on-the-spot advice and information about the NHS. You can contact them on freephone 0800 032 02 02 or e-mail northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

If you would like further information about health conditions and treatment options, you may wish to have a look at the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk

If you would like to find accessibility information for our hospitals, please visit www.accessable.co.uk

This leaflet is available in alternative formats on request by telephoning 0191 2825413 (Monday to Friday, 8.45am to 5pm)

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