

NUCLEOPLASTY

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Nucleoplasty? Nucleoplasty is a minimally invasive procedure developed to treat patients with contained, or mildly herniated discs. Nucleoplasty literally means removal of the nucleus (the center gel-like substance of the disc). The outer band-like substance of the disc is the annulus fibrosis. Typically when a disc herniates, the annulus fibrosis opens and allows the nucleus pulposus to protrude and compress structures such as nerves.

How is it performed? The procedure is performed in a surgical center with x-ray guidance. Nucleoplasty is done with the patient lying on the stomach. Medications are given to help with comfort and relaxation. The skin is cleaned with an antiseptic solution and the back is numbed with a local anesthetic before the procedure is performed. The patient is carefully monitored throughout the procedure. A special access needle is placed into the disc under x-ray guidance. A wand-like device is then inserted through the needle and into the disc. The device uses heat to remove disc material and seal the channel made by the needle. Several channels are made depending on how much disc material needs to be removed.

What will I feel during the procedure? You will feel a sense of pressure, or mild discomfort when the needle is inserted into the disc. Your doctor will closely monitor your comfort level throughout the procedure.

How many discs are treated? Based on your symptoms and discogram, your doctor will determine which disc or discs may be causing your pain. Typically, only two or three discs are treated at a time.

How long does the procedure take? A nucleoplasty takes about 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the amount of disc material needing to be removed. Please note however, the total number of hours you will be at the surgical center can be up to 3-5 hours for pre op and post op care.

Will I be sedated for this procedure? Yes. This procedure is done under local anesthesia. Most of the patients receive other medications to help them relax and make the procedure easier to tolerate. You will need to be awake to tell your doctor what you are feeling.

What should I do after the procedure? We advise patients to take it easy the day of the procedure. You may need to apply ice to the affected area for 20-30 minutes at a time for the next 48 hours. Typically, driving, lifting, bending/twisting at the waist are restricted in the first few weeks.

What are the risks and side effects involved? With any procedure there are risks, side effects, and possible complications. The most common side effect is discomfort, which is temporary. This pain gets better quickly. For other risks please speak with a nurse in the office.

Note: This procedure cannot be performed if you have an active infection, flu, cold, fever, or very high blood pressure. Please make us aware of these conditions.