

Neck Pain

Frequently Asked Questions ...



Moe R. Lim, MD

UNC Orthopaedics (919-96B-ONES)

UNC Spine Center (919-957-6789)



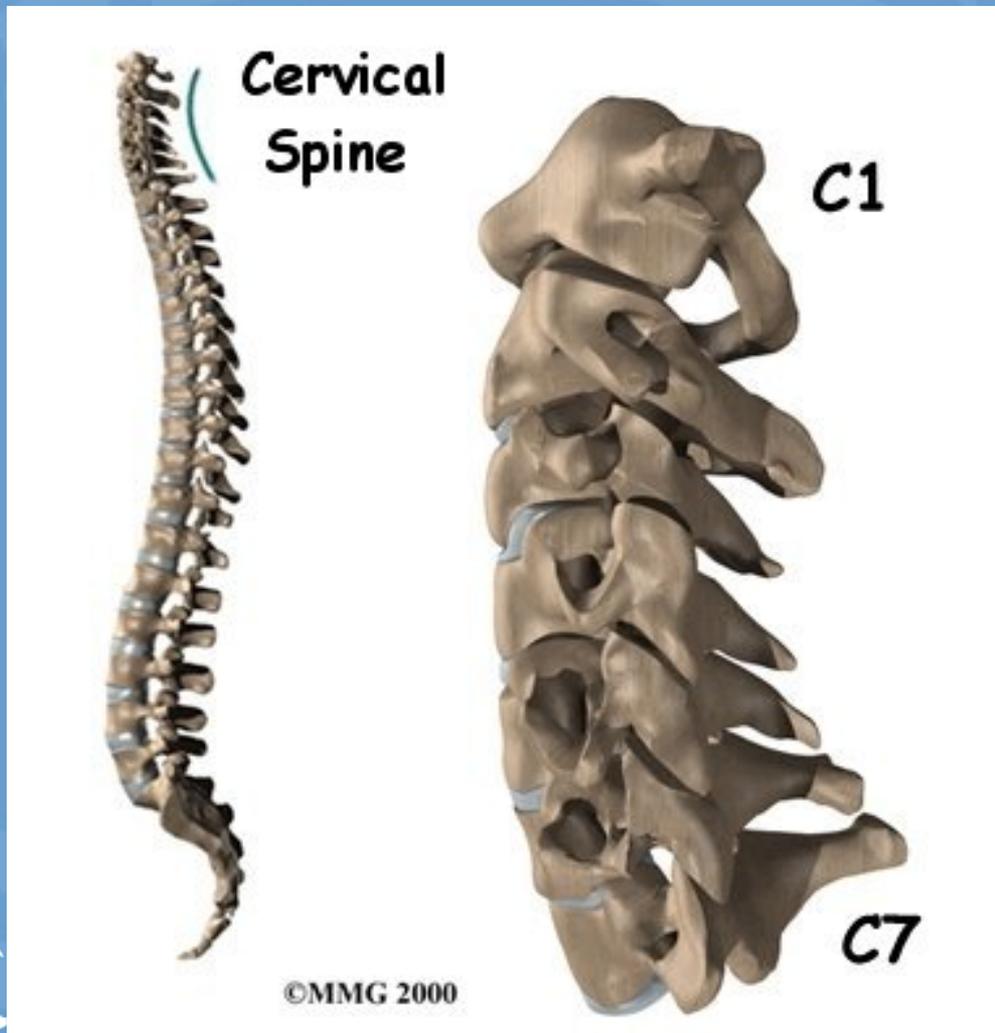
UNC
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Neck Pain



UNC
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

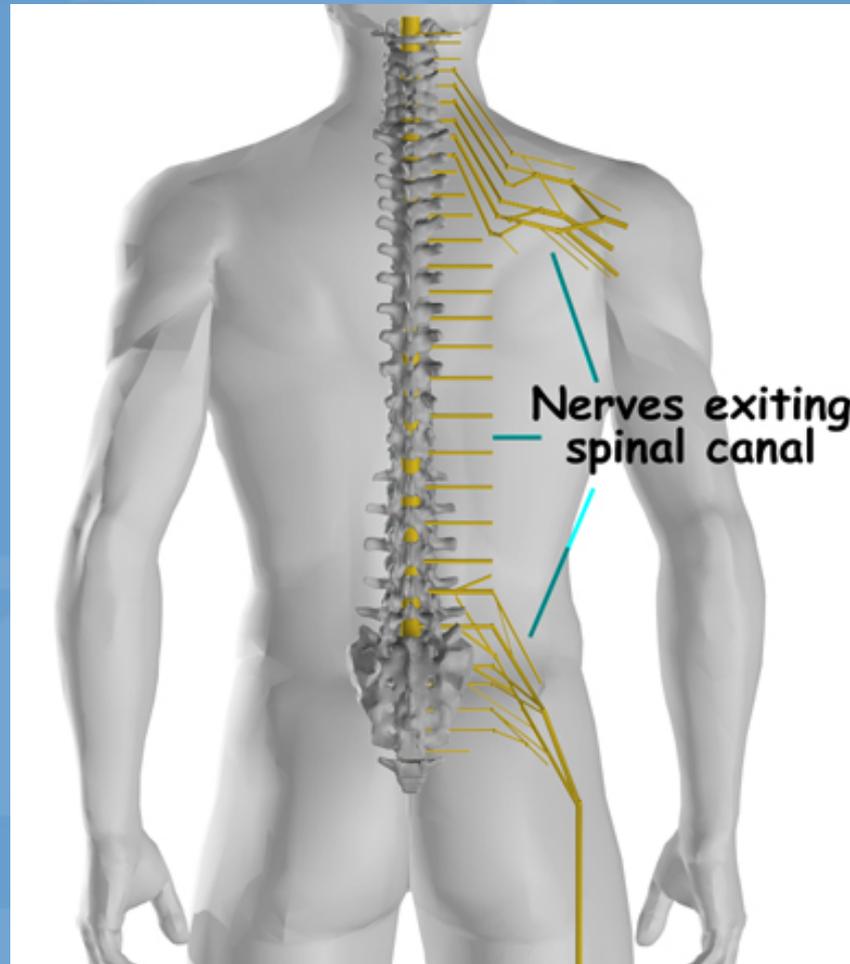
Human Spine



- 25 bones
- Cervical (7)
- Thoracic (12)
- Lumbar (5)
- Sacrum

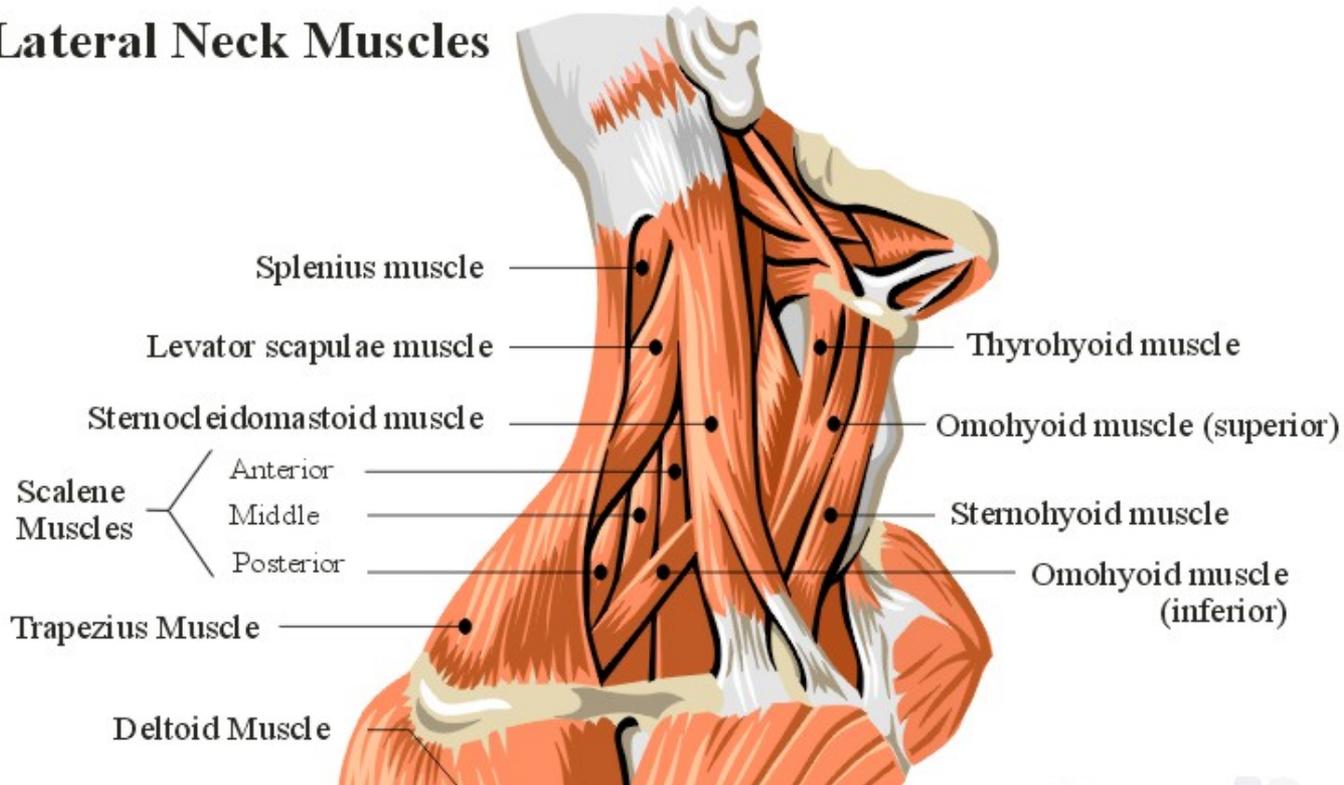


Human Spine

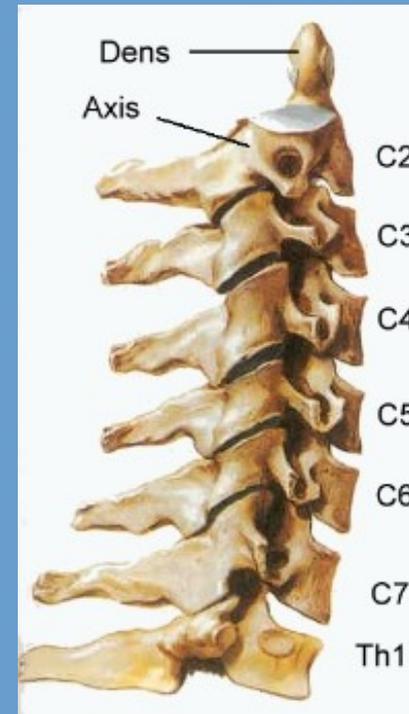
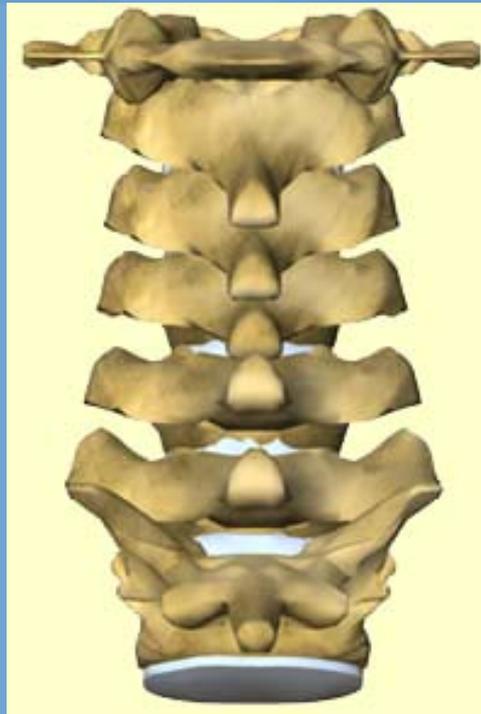


Muscles

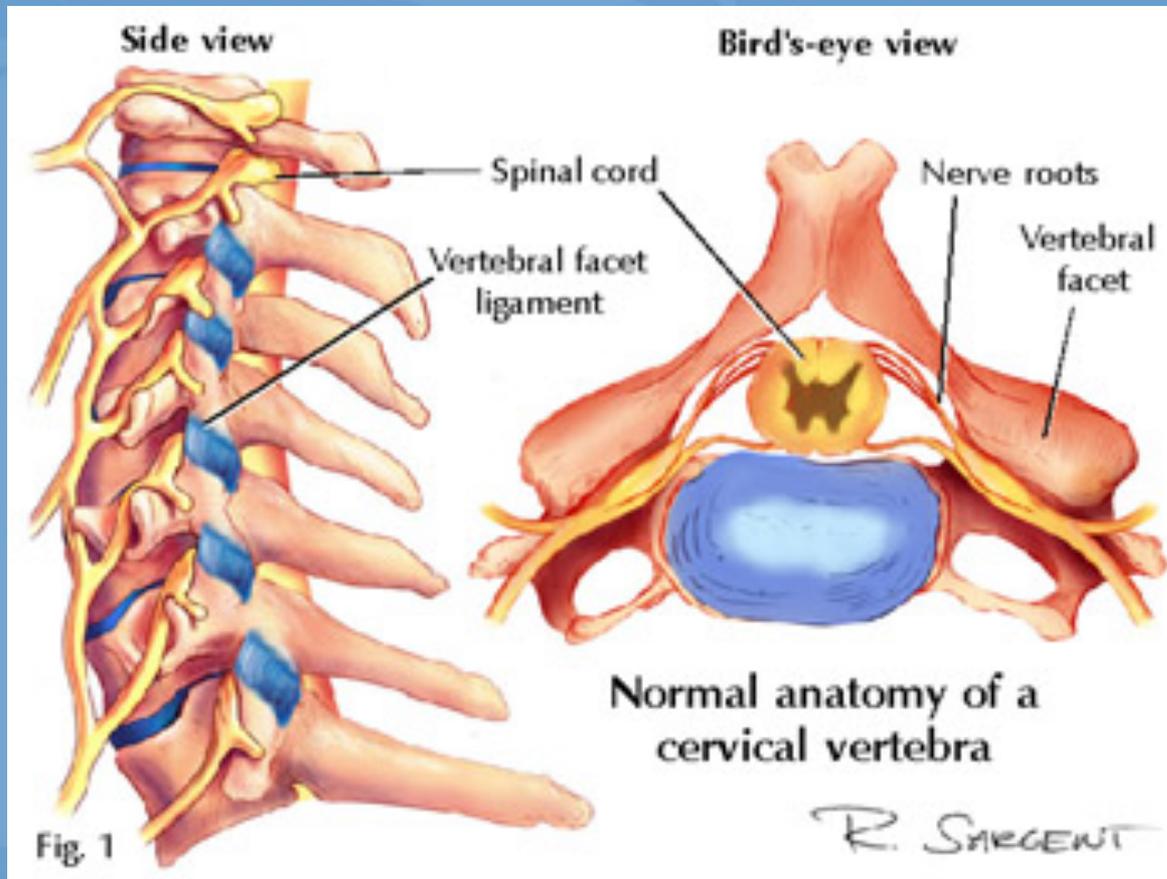
Lateral Neck Muscles



Bones and Discs



Spinal Cord and Nerves



Cervical Spine Functions

- 1) Support weight of the head
- 2) Allow for motion of the head
- 3) Protect critical neural and vascular structures



Is neck pain common?



Is neck pain common?

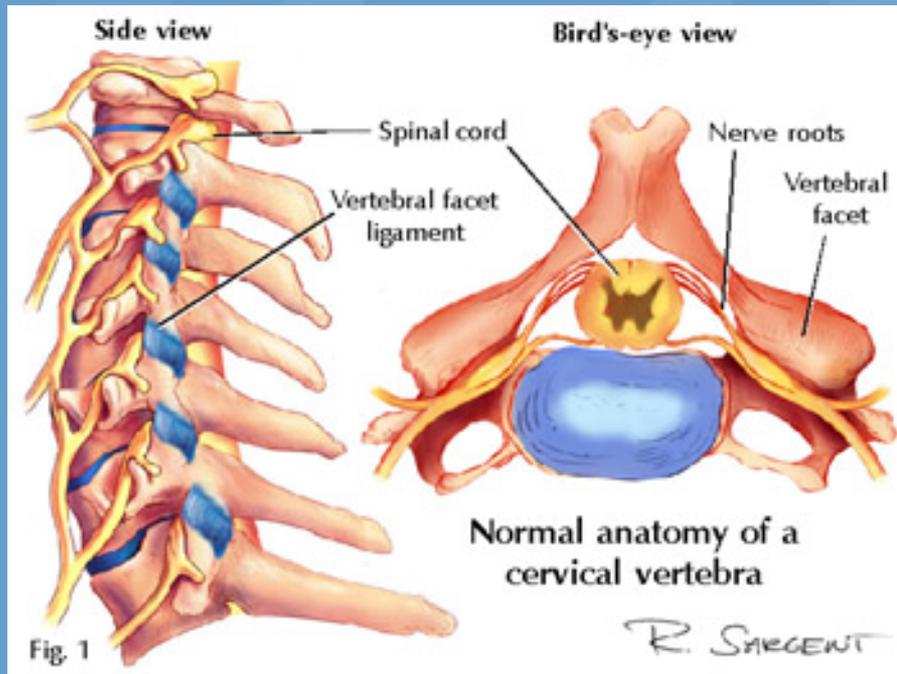
- Yes!
- 2/3 lifetime prevalence
- 10% point prevalence
- Associated with
 - Stress
 - Reading
 - Higher education



What causes neck pain?



What causes neck pain?



- Discs
 - Facet joints
 - Ligaments
 - Muscles
 - Nerves
-
- However, it is difficult to determine the exact anatomic cause in individual patients.



Why did this happen to me?



UNC
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Why me?



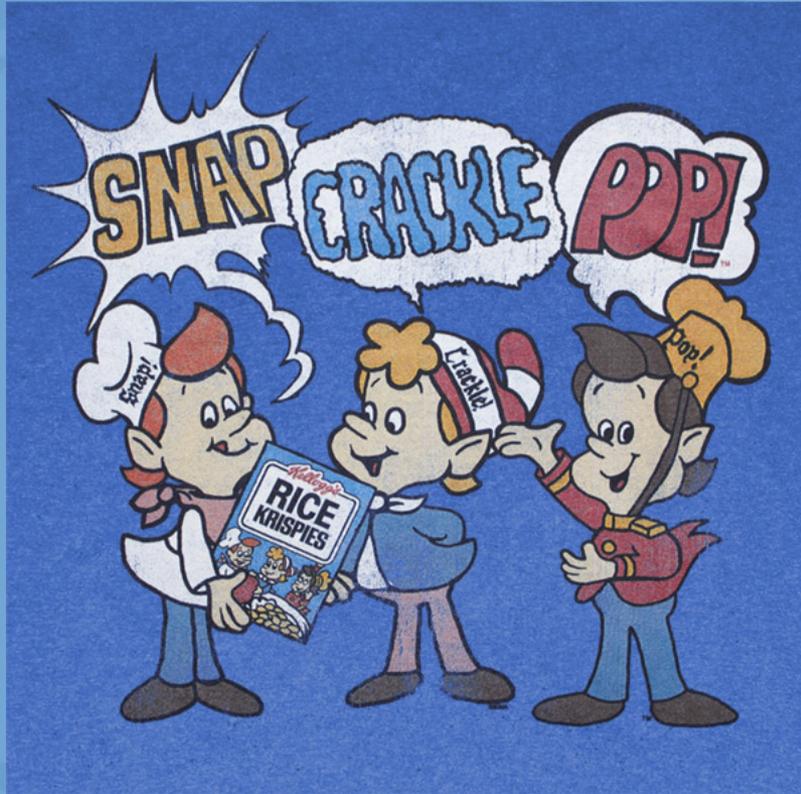
- Genetics !
- Smoking
 - Oxygen starvation
 - Nicotine is toxic to disc cells



My neck pops and cracks.
Should I be concerned ?



Neck pops and cracks



- Cause unknown
- Not a serious sign of a problem unless there is associated pain



How do I know if my neck pain
is serious or not?



Common neck pain

(from age-related changes)



- Mild
- Dull ache or sharp
- Starts gradually
- Waxes and wanes
- Worse with stress and increased activity
- Better with over-the-counter pain medications



Serious neck pain

(from infection, cancer, fracture ...)



- Severe
- Fevers, chills, weight loss
- Associated with an injury
- Sudden onset or change
- Awakens you from sleep
- Progressively worse
- Pain, numbness, weakness in the arms or legs



Will my neck pain get better?

When?



Yes! It will get better!

- Short-term

- 80% of patients better by 3 months

- Long-term

- 50% asymptomatic
- 25% intermittent
- 25% moderately disabled



Should I have an MRI?



UNC
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

MRI



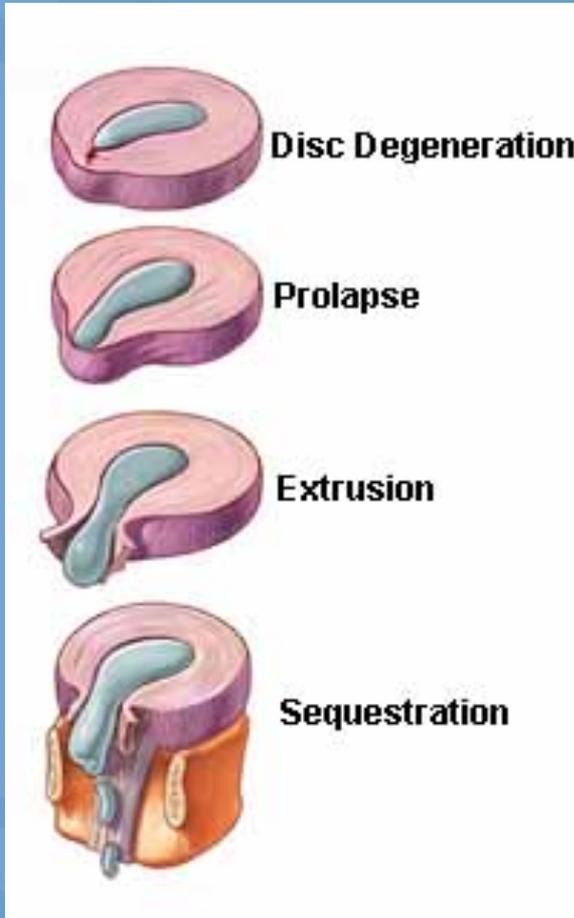
- MRI is a great tool to show anatomy but not everyone with neck pain needs an MRI



What is a herniated disc?



Herniated Disc



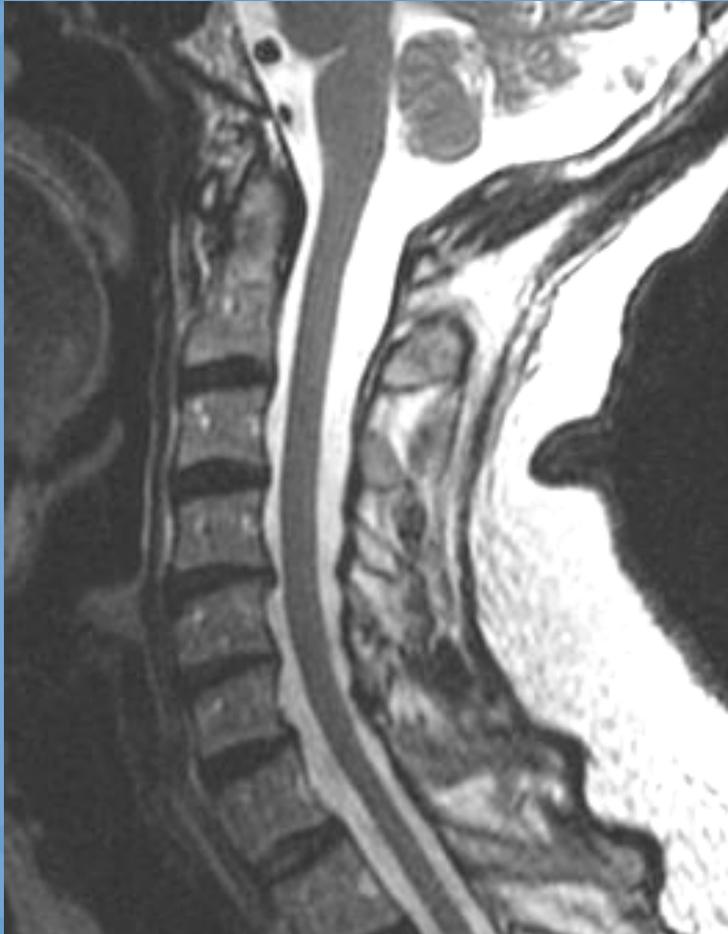
- Not all “herniated discs” are the same. In general, a disc that wears out and moves out of place is called a disc herniation.



Are bulging discs “normal”?



Bulging Discs



- Usually!
- Bulging discs such as these on the left are normal just like the wrinkles in our skin
- They are abnormal if nerve roots or the spinal cord get compressed



Abnormal Disc Herniation



- Herniated disc causing compression and swelling of the spinal cord



What can be done for my neck pain?



Non-Surgical Treatment

- Medications
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol)
- Anti-Inflammatories
 - Ibuprofen (Motrin)
 - Aspirin
 - Naproxen (Aleve)



Non-Surgical Treatment



- Soft Collar
 - For temporary use



Non-Surgical Treatments



- Ice
- Heat



Non-Surgical Treatments



- Cervical Pillows



Non-Surgical Treatments



- Acupuncture
- Massage
- Ultrasound
- Traction



Non-Surgical Treatments



- Physical Therapy
 - Isometrics
 - Aerobic conditioning
 - Flexibility
 - Home program



What can I do to prevent this
from happening again?



Prevention



- Avoid Smoking
- Home Physical Therapy Program
 - Strength
 - Flexibility
 - Aerobic fitness
 - Proper neck mechanics



When do I need surgery?

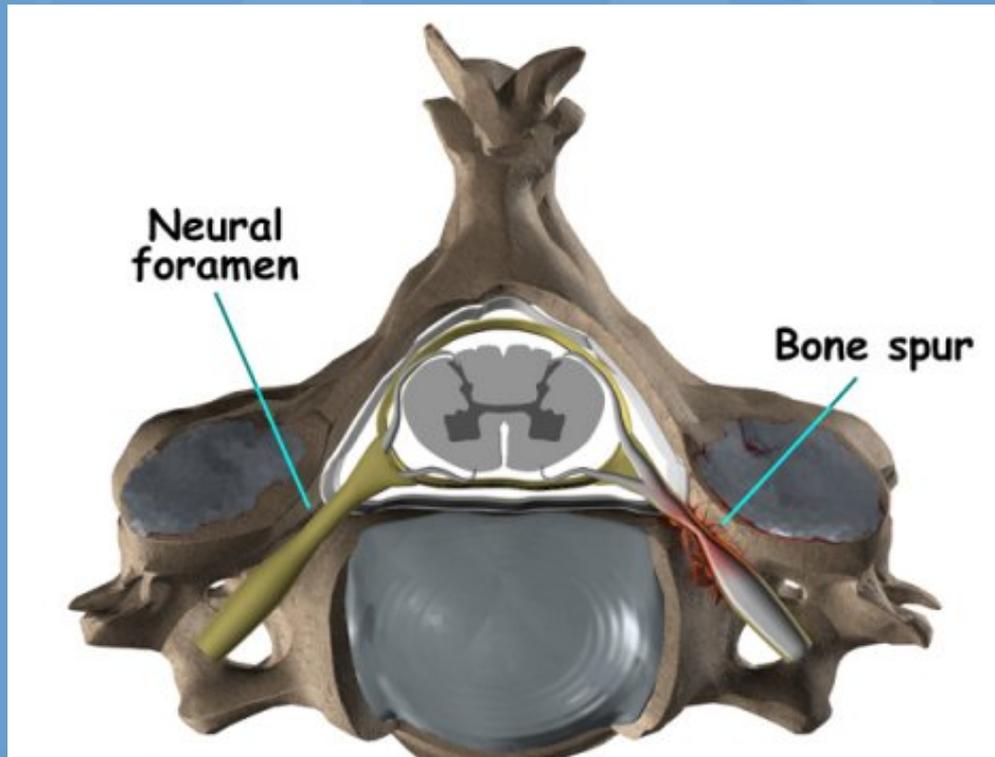


UNC
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

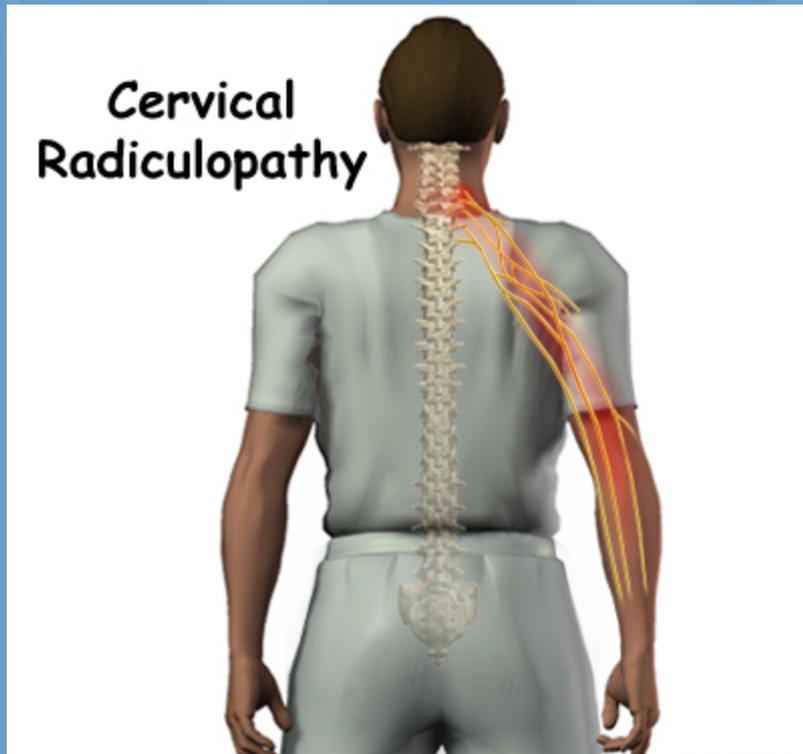
Surgery may be necessary if the nerves or the spinal cord become compressed



Cervical Radiculopathy (Compressed Nerve Root)



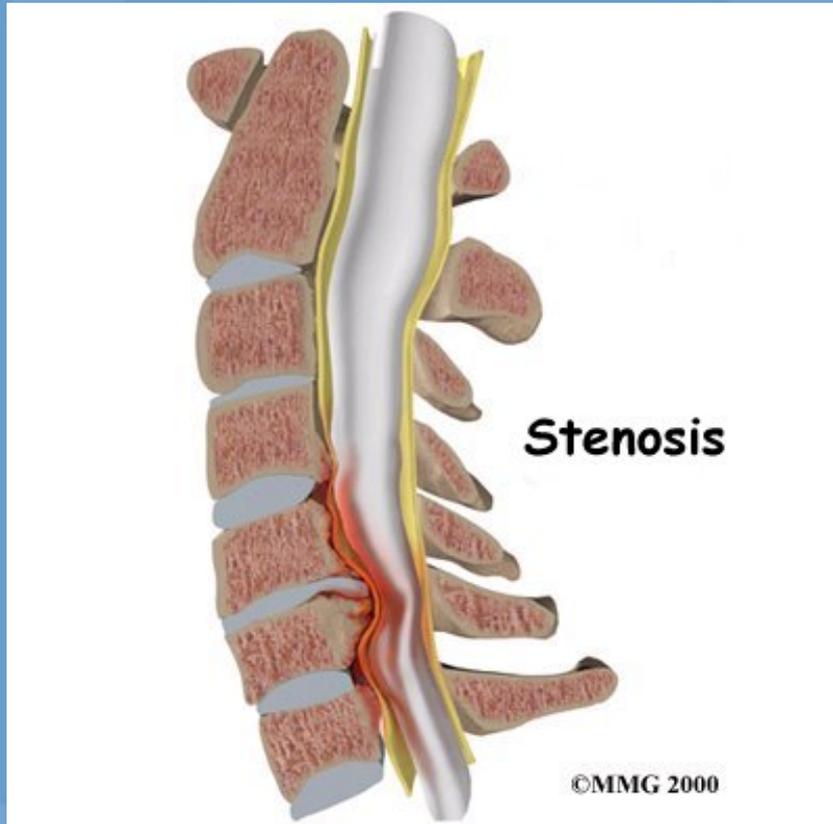
Cervical Radiculopathy



- Pain down the arm
- Burning
- Numbness
- Tingling
- Weakness
- Worse with neck movement



Cervical Myelopathy (Compressed Spinal Cord)



- More serious than compressed nerve
- High risk of permanent damage



Cervical Myelopathy



Symptoms



- Numb/Tingling
- Weakness
 - Trouble with buttons
 - Dropping coins
 - Handwriting change
- Trouble walking
- Loss of bladder control



What kind of surgery will I need?



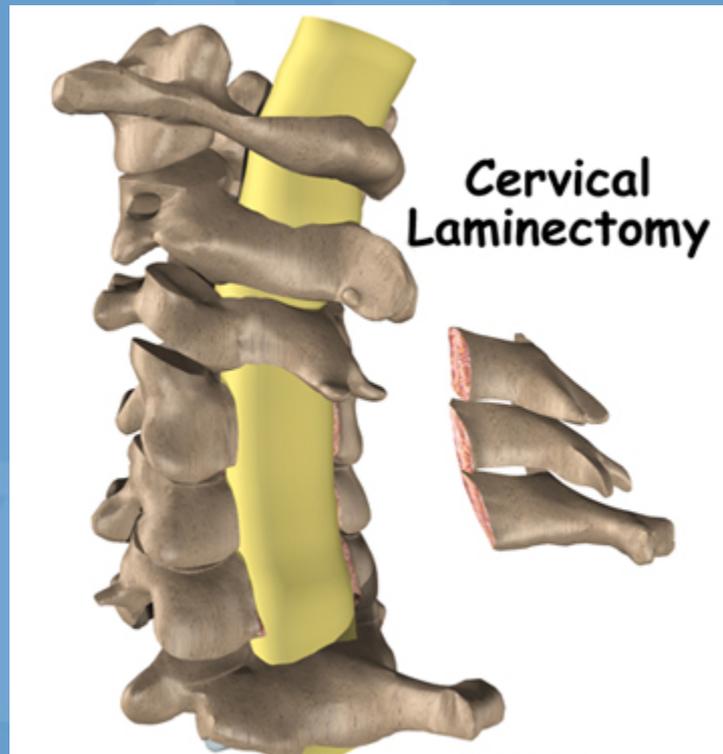
Surgical Treatments



- Wide variety of options
- Goals of surgery
 - Take pressure off nerves and spinal cord
 - Stabilize
- Communicate with surgeon to choose the treatment best suited for you

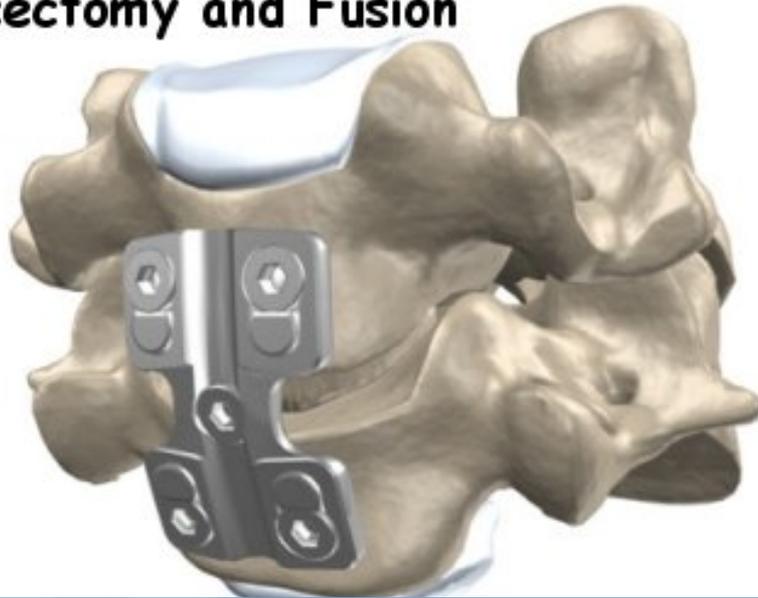


Surgical Treatments



Surgical Treatments

Anterior Cervical Discectomy and Fusion



Important questions to ask...

- Will I have permanent damage if I delay surgery ?
- Are there non-surgical alternatives ?
- Will I need a fusion ?
- Are there non-fusion alternatives ?



Important questions to ask ...

- What are the risks of surgery ?
- Does the surgeon use neurophysiologic spinal cord monitoring to enhance safety during surgery?
- Is surgery successful ?
 - How does the surgeon define success ?



Important questions to ask ...

- When can I return to work ?
- When can I return to sports ?
- How long will the surgeon continue to follow me for check-ups after surgery ?



Summary

- Neck Pain
 - Very common and usually not serious
 - Majority will get better and does not require surgery
 - Look out for arm pain, numbness/tingling, weakness, loss of coordination, trouble with balance
 - Surgery is successful for specific nerve and spinal cord problems



Moe R. Lim, MD

UNC Orthopaedics (919-96B-ONES)

UNC Spine Center (919-957-6789)



UNC
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE