

Thoracic back pain

Posted by zahul - 09 May 2013 04:57

Dr. Corenman, I've been having back pain for over a year now. I've had an MRI of my entire spine and it showed multiple disc herniations. The one I'm more afraid of are the ones in my thoracic spine due to the risk of myelopathy and invasive surgery that can cause more chronic pain after.

The MRI report said there is no radicular contact but I feel like I have a knife stuck in my upper back. The pain doesn't radiate down my ribs but it's constant (goes away when lying flat).

A few images of my thoracic MRI can be seen here: imgur.com/a/vHXrd

The last three images are from the T8-T9 disc which looks the worst.

I'm confused because my MRI report also said there is cord compression without myelopathy but I've seen two neurologists and the both said the MRI doesn't show any sign of cord compression and I don't have any neurological signs, only brisk reflexes.

I would really like your opinion regarding whether or not I have cord compression. I'm only 24 and I don't understand how I've got so many disc herniations.

Thank you very much for the support you give to those with neck and back pain

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Re: Thoracic back pain

Posted by Dr. Corenman - 24 May 2013 07:07

This is a typical history with thoracic degenerative disc disease but with a happier ending. Epidural injections are the mainstay of treatment along with extension strengthening exercises. Most patients, if they can "wait it out", will slowly improve. Rarely, some patients have to undergo surgery.

Dr. Corenman

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Re: Thoracic back pain

Posted by anelsen15 - 24 May 2013 16:15

sorry I was trying to post within another topic about thoracic but it looks as it started a stand alone. Still learning site.

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Re: Thoracic back pain

Posted by zahul - 25 May 2013 23:03

What are some extension strengthening exercises? I'm afraid to exercise because I think I might make the herniations even worse but I would love to try some beneficial exercises.

I haven't yet tried epidurals because from the stories I've read online they don't seem to work for everyone and when they do there is not great relief. What is the cause of this? When an epidural provides no relief is it because it wasn't done right or it just doesn't work for that patient?

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Re: Thoracic back pain

Posted by Dr. Corenman - 26 May 2013 17:05

Extension strengthening exercises include rowing on a rowing machine and exercise ball extensions where you lie face down with the ball touching your belly and extend up. You can increase the difficulty with your hands behind your neck.

Epidurals will work under the right circumstances. If facet pain is the cause and not disc pain, the epidural will not be effective. If the disc bulge is "contained", the steroid may not contact the painful structure. There is the slight possibility that the fluid is placed in the incorrect space.

Dr. Corenman

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Re: Thoracic back pain

Posted by zahul - 02 Jun 2013 07:03

Thank you Dr. Corenman.

I've visited a surgeon this week. He said I don't need surgery. He also said that he can operate from the back. I asked how he does it, he seemed to explain a laminectomy. He said it has a great risk of

paralysis. From what I've learned online, laminectomies aren't recommended for thoracic herniation as a lot of patients were worse than before surgery.

What was strange was that he said my MRI doesn't match my pain. My entire shoulder blades are hurting very much and there is also some discomfort between them, I also have a very painful spot in my upper lumbar spine. My lumbar bulges are L3-L5, my thoracic bulges are T7-T9 and 2 "minimal" bulges at C3-C4, C5-C6 and a 1-2 mm C4-C5 bulge.

I really don't know what to do with this pain that's starting to take over my life and nobody seems to care about me, I think due to my age.

Two years ago after lifting some weight lifting sessions I started having severe pain in my upper lumbar spine in a relatively small spot right on the spine. The pain got better very very slowly and I started noticing the pain (more like discomfort) in my thoracic spine when I tried to stand straight because I wanted to take care of my back. I had a lumbar MRI that showed the thoracic and lumbar bulges but because by that time my pain went from a 10 to a 5, sometimes even 3 I was hoping eventually I will be left with only some pain. I lived with this tolerable pain but recently I'm having really bad pain but this time more diffuse and all over my back but mainly thoracic. My lumbar spot still hurts very often, sometimes even considerably but my constant pain is my thoracic back that hurts continuously and on a large area.

My thoracic MRI from nearly two months ago showed the same disc problems, they didn't get worse. My pain is worse than two months ago so I think maybe I should get another one but my doctor doesn't want to send me for one.

Is there really no way to ease my pain?

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Re: Thoracic back pain

Posted by Dr. Corenman - 02 Jun 2013 18:11

It is hard to determine what is causing your pain by your history.

You need a workup to determine what your pain generators are. A very thorough history and physical examination are needed. A careful inspection of your images might be very helpful. Some patients have undiagnosed disorders like Scheuermann's degenerative changes. Diagnostic injections will be necessary. This may include facet blocks, selective nerve root blocks and/or discograms. Without a doubt, pain diaries will be needed (see section on this in the website).

There might possibly be another answer to control your pain. A spinal cord or peripheral nerve stimulator might be helpful to relieve some pain. I have just finished writing a section on this particular treatment that should be on the website next week.

Dr. Corenman

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