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# CHAPTER 2

## Which of the 7 Types of Back Pain Do You Have?

The seven types of neck and back pain are:

1. **Nerve root pain** from compression and irritation of a spinal nerve by a herniated spinal disc
2. **Neurogenic pain** caused by loss of oxygen to the spinal nerves by constriction of the spinal canal (spinal stenosis) and/or smoking
3. **Mechanical pain**, caused by an unstable spine from an injury or defect such as spondylolisthesis (slippage of the spine)
4. **Chemical or discogenic pain** from breakdown products of a degenerated disc
5. **Muscle fatigue pain** from an out-of-balance deformity such as curvature or slippage of the spine
6. **Inflammatory pain** such as from arthritis or infection of the spine
7. **Central pain** resulting from a low threshold to pain, secondary to depression and/or narcotic-induced depletion of endorphins

*It is important to know what type of neck and back pain you are suffering from, because the treatment and prevention of recurrence will differ depending on the type.*

Neck and back pain conditions are usually the result of some combination of these types acting at the same time. In the first phases of disc degeneration,

mechanical pain from a loose disc may predominate. In later stages of disc degeneration, the primary discomfort may be chemical pain from irritating breakdown products of the disc. A herniated disc may cause nerve root pain by stretching and compressing an adjacent spinal nerve, whereas a collapsed bulging disc may cause constriction of the spinal nerve channels (spinal stenosis), resulting in neurogenic pain. Inflammatory pain may come from a disc-space infection or from one of several forms of inflammatory arthritis that affect the disc, such as rheumatoid arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis. Pain that is experienced as the result of faulty central (brain) pain modulating systems is usually secondary to depression and/or depletion of our body's own natural pain killers – our endorphins – by narcotics or muscle relaxants.

It is important to know what type of neck and back pain you are suffering from, because the treatment and prevention of recurrence will differ depending on the type. Treatment for one type of pain may make another type of pain worse: painkillers for nerve pain may make central pain worse, and disc excision to treat neurogenic pain may cause the disc to collapse further and exacerbate spinal stenosis and neurogenic pain.

How do you know what type of neck and/or back pain is causing you to suffer? The following questionnaire is made up of statements or questions that are grouped into the seven types of pain. If you answer most of the questions yes in one group you are probably suffering from that type of pain. However, it is also possible that you are suffering from more than one type of pain at the same time. Let us begin the quiz.

## **1) Nerve root pain**

If you answer most of these questions with a yes, then you most likely are suffering from nerve root pain from a herniated disc:

- I have pain from my low back down the back of my leg, down the front of my leg, or from my neck into my arm. Yes No
- The pain in my leg or arm is associated with numbness, tingling, pins and needles, or other bothersome sensations. Yes No