

What Is An EMG- Do I Need It To Diagnose My Herniated Disc

People do get EMGs now, it is a bit controversial, but sometimes it does help quite a bit with the diagnosis. Basically, if you have symptoms going into an arm, we need to know what is causing those symptoms and one way to do it is what I call the line test, like your electrician or the guy out in the street does checking the electrical lines when there is a break in the current. You try to find out where is the break and that is what the EMG does. It is an electronic measurement of the nerve running all the way from your fingertip all the way up to your neck. Now, is the problem you are having coming from the wrist, is it coming from the elbow, is it coming from the shoulder, or is it coming from the pinched nerve in the neck? And the EMG is a test that can map out that nerve all the way from your fingertips up to your head and try to give us some idea where the compression or where the problem is occurring. Now, it is not the most accurate test in the world, but it sometimes does give really valuable information. So, if you got these symptoms and we are not really sure, may be the MRI is not so conclusive, it is a really good time to think about an EMG and there are doctors that do this specifically and some are very, very good at it and it does depend on the doctor doing it. It requires a skill and it requires an interpretation of the test, but sometimes it can give really good information. Now, typically with the cervical herniated disc, we do not need it because we have clear symptoms and we get the MRI and it confirms what the problem is. So in that case there is really no need to get the EMG. But again if there is a case we are not clear about what is causing the problem and it is we called diagnostic dilemma, like why is this patient have these symptoms, it is not so clear to me or are the symptoms coming from the neck and a problem with lets say carpal tunnel syndrome in the wrist, get an EMG and then we can get more information. Remember the information is really important when you are trying to get treated for a cervical herniated disc. For me as a surgeon I love information, I do not want to operate on someone who does not need surgery and I do not want to not operate on someone who needs it, so I need a lot of information and if you are heading towards surgery, you want to really make sure that it is the cervical herniated disc that is causing your problem. There is nothing worse than having surgery for what you think is a cervical herniated disc and waking up still with numbness in the hand finding out that you had carpal tunnel syndrome. So in that case EMGs can help differentiate where most of the symptoms are coming from. But usually patients come in with very clear symptoms where it is not required. So EMG is a test done, it is done with needles, so it is not the most comfortable test. I do not think it is most uncomfortable, but it is not something I would do because I have nothing else to that day, but if you need it you do it, but I would not say it is great. It is not like an x-ray where you just sit there and have your picture taken. It does involve the needles and you can speak to the doctor who is doing it about what that feels like, but it does give

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sometimes valuable information, but typically not needed with a typical cervical herniated disc.

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