

Cervical Disc Anatomy 6- What's The Difference Between A Nerve Root And The Spinal Cord

So what is a nerve root, the nerve root is not the spinal cord. The nerve root comes from the spinal cord. It is an offshoot of the spinal cord. Remember, the spinal cord starts up in the brain and goes down in the middle of the spine and along the way, it encounters the discs and sometimes are herniated discs, but offshoot from the spinal cord is a branch called the nerve root which you can see here in yellow. It looks sort of like a worm. It is about that size and it comes off and goes all the way down the arm. Each nerve root goes to a different place in the arm. I would like to think a bit like if you are driving on the highway and you come to an exit that exit ramp going off the highway is like a nerve root. So if you think of the spinal cord is the highway, the nerve root, this is exit three, exit four, exit five and each exit road takes you somewhere else just like each nerve root takes you somewhere else and that's why if your herniated disc is putting pressure on a nerve root, you are going to feel the symptom where that nerve root goes. So if you are squeezing this nerve root, you are going to have some tingling in your thumb. If you are squeezing this nerve root, you are going to have some tingling in your middle finger. If you are squeezing this one, maybe in your pinky. So that tell us the doctor where the nerve root may be irritated, which then is correlated with an MRI scan and then we can confirm the diagnosis of cervical herniated disc. So the spinal cord starts at the top and the nerve root is a branch of that and that nerve root controls things such as numbness and tingling and even weakness.

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