

That's the spirit! New alcohol gel that can fix your slipped disc and relieve pain by 80% launched in UK

- Treatment, called Discogel, has been available around Europe for several years
- It can relieve pain by up to 80 per cent and launched in the UK earlier this year
- Gel banishes pain because alcohol absorbs water leaking from damaged disc

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A gel made with [alcohol](#) and injected into the spine could ease the agony of slipped discs.

The gel banishes pain because the alcohol in it absorbs water leaking from the damaged disc. Water escaping from a disc aggravates nerves in the spinal cord and inflames surrounding tissues.

Thousands of patients have had the treatment, called Discogel, in Europe, where the gel has been available for several years. It launched in the UK earlier this year.



- **A gel made with alcohol and injected into the spine could ease the agony of slipped discs. The treatment is called Discogel and has been available around Europe for years**

A 2015 French study in the journal *Orthopaedics And Traumatology* showed the gel could relieve pain by up to 80 per cent in patients who didn't get better with physiotherapy and painkillers — the usual treatment for a slipped disc.

Slipped discs affect around one in 20 people. They can be triggered by bending awkwardly, lifting heavy items, sitting for long periods or being severely overweight.

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The spine is made up of 24 vertebrae. In between each one is a circular pad of tissue known as a disc. These discs have a tough outer case which surrounds a gel-like substance, and water to keep it moist and flexible.

Problems arise when the outer casing gets damaged. This can occur through injury but is more commonly due to ageing, as the discs become less flexible and are more likely to split.

Once they are damaged, the soft gel and water put pressure on nerves in the spine — usually the sciatic nerve which runs from the base of the spine to the knee.



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- **The gel banishes pain because the alcohol in it absorbs water leaking from the damaged disc**
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Steroid jabs are often used to dampen inflammation. But the effects wear off after a few months. In severe cases, surgery is needed to release the compressed nerve and remove part of the disc.

In many cases, over several months, a slipped disc will shrink away from the nerve as the water dries up naturally, easing the pain. Discogel aims to speed up this process.

Patients are given a local anaesthetic and the gel is injected into the middle of the damaged disc. They go home the same day.

It is designed to be used at an early stage on patients with severe disc problems, as well as those who fail to get better with physiotherapy — potentially avoiding the need for surgery.

The gel is made from cellulose, a fibrous material derived from plants; alcohol; and tungsten — a metal which makes it show up on X-ray so doctors can tell if it is being injected in the right place.

As well as mopping up water, the gel provides structural support that can reduce the risk of the disc collapsing further.

Colin Natali, a consultant spinal surgeon at The Lister Hospital in London, says the gel could benefit some patients. But he adds that as most slipped discs get better on their own, the procedure may not always be necessary.

‘The reason we do not routinely operate on these patients is because most disc problems resolve themselves with physiotherapy and exercise,’ he says.

‘Some patients treated with Discogel would probably get better anyway.’

Meanwhile a tummy tuck may also reduce back pain, according to Australian researchers.

Around 200 women who suffered back pain and incontinence after childbirth were given abdominoplasty procedures, where doctors improve the shape of the abdomen with liposuction, removing excess skin and repairing abdominal muscles that may have weakened in pregnancy and childbirth.

Surveys taken six months after the operation showed patients had significant improvements in back pain and urinary incontinence, reported the journal Plastic And Reconstructive Surgery. It's thought that repairing abdominal muscles stabilises the spine and improves posture, which aid back pain.

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