

# COLUMBIA

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## Zapping Back Pain

The severe back pain of a herniated disc is generally treated with bed rest, physical therapy, and drugs. When all this fails, some sufferers resort to major surgery. But a new form of laser surgery developed by Columbia faculty has helped 75 percent of the 121 patients at the Columbia-affiliated St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center on whom it has been performed, according to Daniel Choy, assistant clinical professor of medicine.

The new technique, called percutaneous laser disc decompression, is an outpatient procedure using a local anesthetic. The surgeon inserts a hollow needle into the soft part of the

herniated disc, then delivers a short burst of laser energy through an optical fiber. The procedure vaporizes a small part of the disc, shrinking it slightly, which relieves the pressure on the nerve that causes the pain. Patients usually go back to work within three days.

Since Dr. Choy and a colleague first performed the operation at the University of Graz in Austria in 1986, it has been done over a thousand times worldwide with only one minor complication.