

# Degenerative Disc Disease

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**Situation:** Degenerative disc disease is a term used to describe the weakening of the intervertebral discs. Intervertebral discs are essential to movements like bending, stretching, and twisting because they serve as cushions or shock absorbers between the vertebrae of your spine.

**Causes:** Degenerative disc disease typically occurs as either part of the natural aging process or as the result of an injury. The condition usually starts with misalignments or “chiropractic subluxations” of the vertebrae of the spine. These subluxations cause small cracks or tears to the disc wall. This damage occurs around sensitive nerve receptors, resulting in localized pain. As the condition progresses, fluid is lost from the core of the disc and, over time, the disc can collapse and harden, allowing the vertebrae to move closer together. As the vertebrae move closer together, the joint becomes improperly aligned. That—combined with the collapse of the disc—results in nerve root compression and referral pain from the spine to the extremities of the body. This unstable and pathological alignment can also cause the formation of bone spurs in the joints of the spine which can grow in or around the nerve roots causing radiating pain.

**Symptoms:** Symptoms include strong localized back pain periodically for years. You will experience muscle stiffness, tightness, and nerve pain with constant ache. Heavy or repeated activities like bending or twisting can worsen the pain which can sometimes be relieved by resting in a prone position.

**Treatment:** Treatment options can include chiropractic care, acupuncture, physical therapy, nutritional counseling and massage therapy. X-rays taken by the chiropractor will be able to show how advanced the degeneration has become. The chiropractor will help determine what type of treatments and modalities are appropriate for you.