

DEGENERATIVE DISC DISEASE

BY FREDERICK EARLSTEIN



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It's Not Just a Back Pain!



Back pain is not the same as degenerative disc disease but many mistake it for just a simple back pain. Degenerative disc disease happens when spinal discs lose their water, mainly because of age or disease which results to thinning, bringing each ends of vertebra closer to each other. This will cause the nerve opening of the spine to narrow as well. Without the shock absorbers, bones can grind together making it painful to perform even simple tasks such as walking, running, or jumping. Poor posture, wear and tear as well as wrong body movements can also cause the spinal disc to weaken and degenerate through time.

Degenerative Disc Disease

Degenerative disc disease changes the structure of the spinal disc, and this result to pain. Many times, it develops to more chronic medical conditions such as osteoarthritis, herniated disc and spinal stenosis. These conditions all come with pain, as the nerves on the spinal cord are constant pressure, affecting their nerve functions.

Types of Degenerative Disc Disease



Degenerative disc can come from any of three regions of the spine that categorizes the inter-vertebral discs. Pain, numbness and tingling sensation are all common in any region but there are some details where the origin and resulting symptoms differ.

DDD #1

The cervical region refers to the neck. There are however, no spinal disc between the first and second disc, which is also referred as atlas and axis, respectively. Compression on the nerve root results to symptoms on the neck region include pain, numbness, tingling; and weakness on the neck that goes all the way down to the shoulders, arms and fingertips. Nerve compression on the cervical region can also develop into myelopathy; which is a collection of different painful symptoms that includes difficulty

in easy daily functions, such as walking, loss of motor skills on fingers; and legs feeling heavy.

DDD #2

The upper and middle back includes to the twelve vertebrates of the spine which starts in the collar bone all the way down to the last segment of the rib. Though thoracic region bulging disc is less common; they can cause pain that originates around the upper back and can radiate all the way to the front; particularly the chest and stomach. This very nature of the symptom misleads people to believing that they experience heart, lung, or gastric tract problems. Thus, it is crucial to consult your doctor to get the right diagnosis.

DDD #3

The lumbar area refers to lower back. Spinal disc problem in this region is the most common cause of low back pain problems. Symptoms include burning, dull and sharp pain that radiates all the way to the backsides; legs and down to the feet.

Spinal disc problems on this region of the spine result into tingling sensation and numbness, weakness, and muscle spasms. In many cases, symptoms may worsen even when just sneezing, coughing and bending over. If the bulging disc on the lumbar area results to painful symptoms, doctors often refer to it as sciatica. In some rare cases, people with this condition experience loss of bowel or bladder control as symptoms.

Degenerative Disc Disease, Do You Have It?



Along with other health and physical conditions that comes with ageing. It is considered normal, as daily activities and repetitive movements that put pressure on our body can really cause wear and tear in its various parts. This is not always a sign of a serious problem to the spine.

It in back only becomes serious when the bulging causes the narrowing of the spinal canal. When bulging disc becomes serious, it causes bone spurs, which presents a whole lot of problems for the spine as it grows behind it. Misuse, overuse and injury to the disc are common among athletes and people who do physical job with stressful repetitive movements. It can weaken the disc and risking people to various spinal disc problems. Also, cigarette smoking contributes to the deterioration of the spinal disc.

Are You Experiencing These Symptoms?

Though it may sound like a very scary medical condition, it is actually a common problem among young adults and older individuals, and should not always cause panic. If the bulging of the disc presses on the nerve, the common symptoms will be numbness, muscle weakness, and pain. Also, depending on which of the nerves have been affected, the pain can make people think it the problem comes from different part of the body, such as kidneys, abdomen, and most commonly, the heart, especially if it's already a case of herniated disc.

Symptoms of degenerative disc occur when a spinal disc swells on its weak point; compressing the nearby nerve roots on spinal cord. The pressure causes the pain receptors to send signals throughout the compressed nerve while simultaneously disrupting the sensory information transmission, causing numbness, pain; and tingling sensation throughout the body. Also, pressure on spinal curve also causes weakness of arm or leg muscles, depending which way the affected nerve goes. In some cases, bulging disc don't compress any spinal nerves, which results to no painful symptoms.

Signs of Aging Discs



As our body ages, many physical and contributory factors can contribute to the breaking down or degeneration of our spinal disc. Some of the common age-related changes include:

Fluid Loss

The loss of fluid from the spinal disc thins the fibro-cartilage, losing flexibility, and reducing its shock absorbing capability, as the distance between vertebrae narrows. These cracks and tiny openings will cause fluid from the spinal disc to bulge or even break open; causing the disc to rupture or even break into fragments. These changes in the quality of the spinal disc are common among cigarette smokers; and those who are regularly exposed to heavy physical work on. Also, too much weight can cause stress to the bones and can contribute to degenerative symptoms.

Spine Damage

As spaces between the spines gets thinner, vertebrae gets lesser padding between each end, causing the spine to become unstable. To cope with this change, our body reacts by making bony growths we call bone spurs or osteophytes. This however, puts a lot of pressure to the spinal nerve roots which results to pain and affects the functions of the nerves. We normally call this back pain degenerative disc.

Diagnosis Process

Proper diagnosis is of course crucial for the course of treatment, as treatment varies depending on what is causing the pain. After locating the problematic spinal disc and assessing its condition, physicians may recommend different options, or combinations of different treatments. Treatment usually starts with conservative methods. Especially if the bulging disc causes mild to

DO YOU FEEL CONSTANT PAIN IN YOUR BACK? YOU MIGHT BE SUFFERING FROM DDD!

DEGENERATIVE DISC DISEASE

Degenerative Disc Disease, also referred as DDD, or back pain degenerative disc is actually quite a misnomer. It is neither degenerative nor a disease. Rather, it's a term used by medical professionals to describe the condition of the spinal cord that resulted primarily from aging.

SYMPTOMS

The general symptoms of most degenerative spine conditions include:

- Pain (chronic or sharp) experienced with either with movement or at rest (or both).
- Limited motion
- Spinal deformity
- Nerve injuries which leads to feeling of weakness on legs and arms
- Sensory loss or tingling sensation
- Sexual dysfunction
- Bladder and/or bowel control problems

TYPES OF DDD

HERNIATED DISCS takes place between the spine's vertebral bones. It is characterized by a protrusion, which can suddenly happen from trauma, but in most cases is developed over years. The most common areas for herniated disc is the lower back (lumbar herniated disc) and neck (cervical herniated disc), while can also happen in mid-back (thoracic herniated disc).

SPINAL STENOSIS is characterized by narrowing of spinal canal, where the spinal cord sits, from the building up of tissue that covers the spine. It can also compress the nerves and the spinal cord. Spinal stenosis is usually lumbar (lower back) and cervical (neck) condition.

BULGING DISCS happens when gel - filled discs in the vertebrae are damaged, due to ageing, constant pressure, injury or trauma, it may form a bulge which pushes back to the spinal canal. The bulge usually occurs on one side, either left or right, putting pressure to the nerves, and causing tingling pain on one side of the body.

CAUSES OF DDD

- Spinal disc fluid loss
- Cracks and tiny tears in spinal disc's outer layer (capsule or annulus)
- Trauma and accidents such as falling, which damages the spine and leads to herniated disc condition.

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moderate pain that resolves on its pain after a couple of days of rest. For the worsening cases however; doctors will most definitely recommend more aggressive approach to treat the problem and address its debilitating symptoms.

Spine specialists like orthopedic spine surgeon or physiatrists may also come into play, especially for cases that needs aggressive treatment.

Surgical Treatments

If those conservative treatments mentioned above have don't seem solve the bulging disc problem, especially the pain, even after the course of several months of treatment, then it's time for more aggressive methods. Study shows that only 10% of bulging disc patients may need surgical intervention. But surgery is crucial to patients suffering from disruptive symptoms such as weakness, severe pain, tingling sensation, and numbness, that won't simply go away.

The idea of surgical procedures for bulging disc is to release compression on the affected nerve. It is important to help patients get back on their daily activities and live a normal life, free of pain and function with better mobility. However, it is worth to note that spine disc surgery can be a sophisticated process and may require lengthy hospital stay. The surgery will make multiple large incisions, which entails grueling recovery period. This is why most good doctors will only see them as last resort.

Conclusion



Though its name makes it sound like it's a progressive, life-threatening, chronic disease. Degenerative Disc Disease, also referred as DDD, or back pain degenerative disc, is actually quite a misnomer. It is neither degenerative nor a disease. Rather, it's a term used by medical professionals to describe the condition of the spinal cord that resulted primarily from aging.

The inter-vertebral disc or better known as spinal disc is a fibro-cartilaginous joint that lies between the vertebral column's adjacent vertebrae and hold them together. Its basic function is to provide a soft cushion between two bones and work like a shock absorber as well as allow the spine to twist, flex and bend. Degenerative disc disease occurs on the spine and commonly found in lower back and upper back or cervical region.

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About

Retired high school biology teacher Frederick Earlstein lives to research. When his only niece was diagnosed with postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS) at age 14, Earlstein felt helpless. His answer was to start researching the condition and sharing everything he learned with his sister and her family. That project not only resulted in a book on the subject, but also to the successful management of the girl's condition.

Earlstein applied the same approach to his own minor problems with blood pressure, allergies, and degenerative disc disease. "It's all about critical mass," he says. "When the notes on my laptop and those piled up on my actual desktop reach a certain level, I start realizing there's a book in there somewhere."

Writing about medical issues in plain English has become Earlstein's second career. After retiring from his career as an educator, he began looking around for something to occupy his time. "You can only clean out the garage so many times," he said. "I was trained to be an academic and old habits die hard."

Now Earlstein works daily in his home office on whatever manuscript he has at hand. He describes the work as the perfect combination of intellectual challenge and self-employment. "I decide what to write about and when to write it," Earlstein says. "Typically I pick a subject because I know someone who is grappling with the problem and with understanding the information they're being given."

A firm believer in the power of informed consent, Earlstein is appalled by how difficult the medical community makes it for the average person to really understand a condition and make good treatment choices. "There's no reason why this material can't be presented in plain English," he says. "You just have to make an effort to really understand what you're talking about."

Although Earlstein makes no claims of being a doctor himself, he does feel he has a good role as an interpreter. "I don't write about any condition until I've studied the material and have a good handle on the mechanics of the problem or the illness," he said. "I'm not shy about calling up a doctor or surgeon and asking questions."

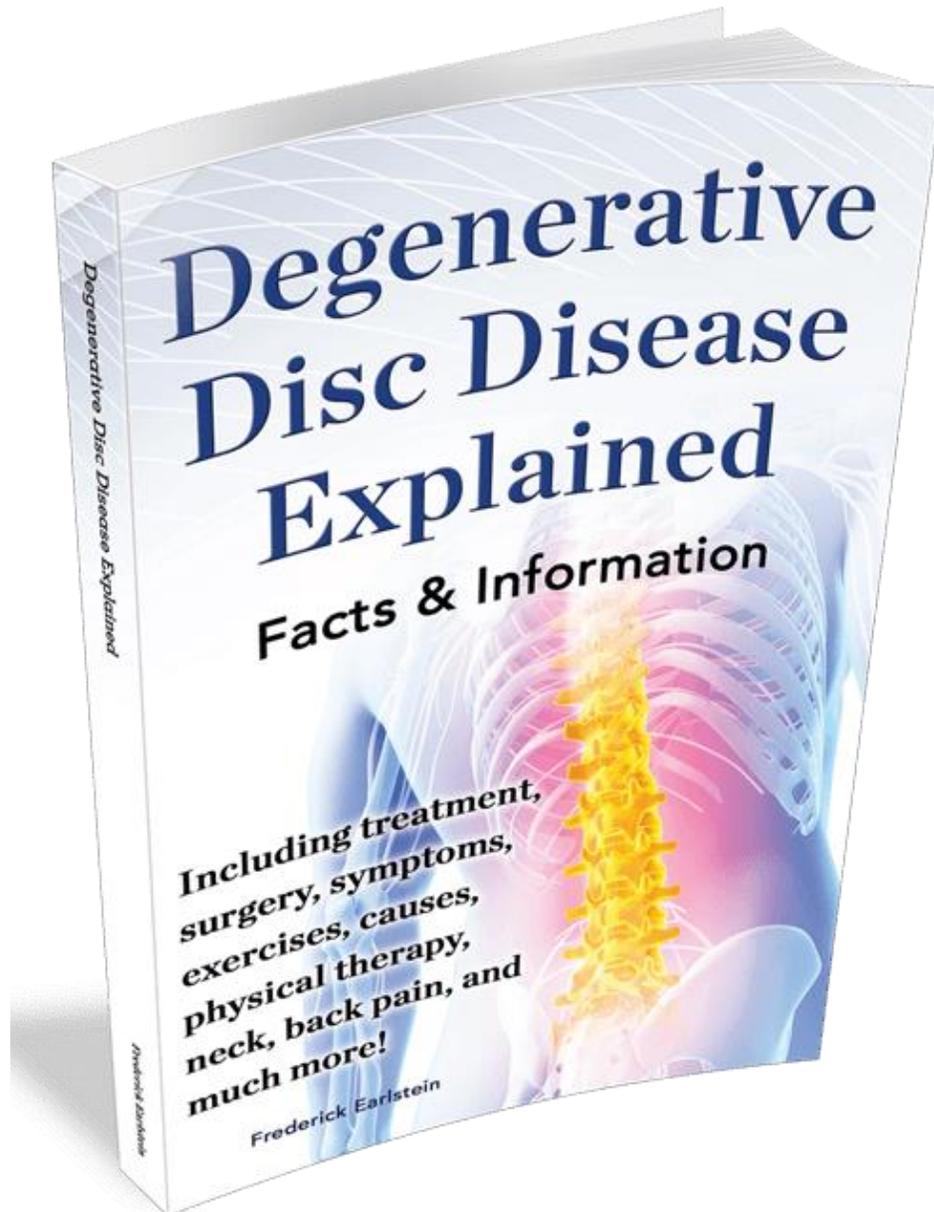
Recently, when his eye doctor told him he was suffering from eye strain, Earlstein immediately began to research the condition. "I knew I had been staring at the computer a lot," Earlstein said. "I didn't know that just getting lightly tinted lenses in my glasses could help. I'm still gathering information and yes, there's a book in the works."

When asked if he prefers writing over teaching, Earlstein makes it very clear that in his mind, he's still a teacher. "I'm just using a different method," he says. "One where I don't have to listen to the snores if I put anyone to sleep!"



Frederick Earlstein

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