

# Editorial on Degenerative Disc Disease

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## Introduction

One of the most common causes of low back and neck pain, as well as one of the most overlooked, is degenerative disc disease. Simply stated, degenerative disc disease is the result of wear and tear on a spinal disc, resulting in back or neck pain. Degenerative disc disease can also cause weakness, numbness, and hot, shooting pains in the arms and legs in some people (radicular pain). Degenerative disc disease is characterised by low-level chronic pain interspersed with more intense pain episodes. The discs are unable to perform their primary functions of cushioning and supplying mobility between the vertebrae when this happens. Although the exact cause is unclear, it is believed to be linked to the dehydration, lose elasticity, and collapse of the intervertebral discs as people age.

Despite its name, degenerative disc disease is more of a normal phenomenon that happens as people age. Degenerative disc disease can affect the spine at any stage, but it is most common in the cervical and lower lumbar regions.

## Causes

The pain caused by degenerative disc disease is caused by two main factors:

Inflammation is a term used to describe a state of being. As the disc degenerates, inflammatory proteins from the interior of the disc space will leak out, causing swelling in the surrounding spinal structures. Muscle pain, spasms, and local tenderness in the back or neck are all symptoms of inflammation. When a nerve root becomes inflamed, pain and numbness can radiate into the arm and shoulder (known as cervical radiculopathy in

cases of cervical disc degeneration), or into the hips and leg (known as lumbar radiculopathy) (called a lumbar radiculopathy, in cases of lumbar disc degeneration).

Micro-motion instability that is abnormal. As a disc's outer layer degenerates, the cushioning and protection it provides decreases, resulting in small unnatural movements between vertebrae. The surrounding muscles can become tense and irritated as a result of these micro-motions. If the spinal segment becomes more unstable, the joints or nerve roots become more painful, causing occasional episodes of more severe pain.

## Treatment Guidelines

Degenerative disc disease care focuses on reducing baseline pain and preventing pain flare-ups to the greatest extent possible. The majority of cases of degenerative disc pain can be managed with a combination of pain relief, exercise/physical therapy, and lifestyle changes.

Some pain management methods are administered at home as self-care practices, including:

**Treatment with ice or cold:** Ice or a cold pack applied to a sore region of the spine may help alleviate pain by reducing inflammation, which is beneficial during exercise or activity.

**The use of heat as a cure:** Heat from a heating pad, adhesive cover, warm water, or other heat source may help to relax surrounding muscles and relieve stress and spasms, which are a major cause of degenerative disc pain.

**TENS units:** TENS systems are electro-stimulation devices. A TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) unit is a small system that sends electric pulses through the body to interrupt and reduce pain signals.

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