



the spinal column

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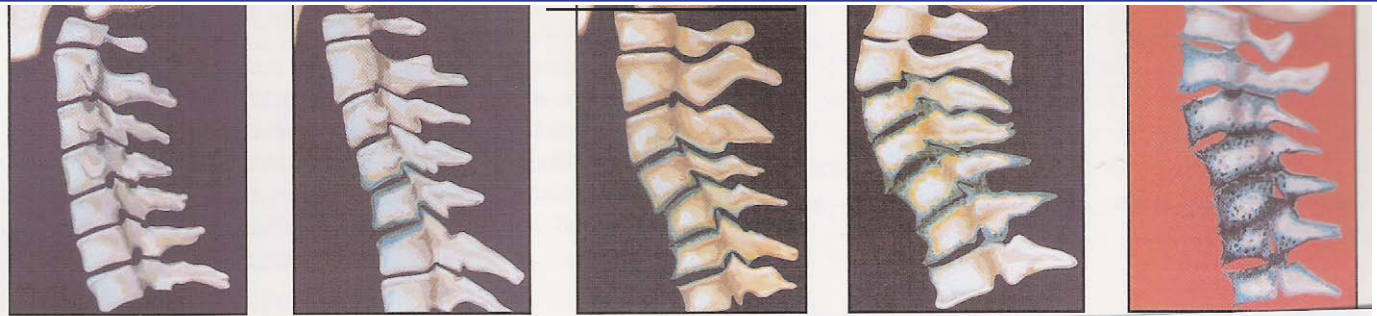
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Spinal Degeneration



These pictures represent the progression of spinal degeneration, starting in the loss of spinal curve, height of the disc, distortion in joints and narrowing in the spinal canal. Left unattended it may result in bone fusion, constant pain, discomfort, weakness and disability.

SPINAL DEGENERATION

An Aging process

"Degenerate" is simply the opposite of "generate", which means grow. When we are growing, our bones and tissues are being formed faster than they are being depleted. After we are grown, more tissue is being destroyed than produced. Healing is a form of regeneration.

Normal Aging Process

There are some positive aspects to the normal aging process of the spine. By the time we are in our 60s and 70s the spine has "degenerated" enough to become more fixed and less vulnerable to injury. Back pain actually tends to lessen with age.

Characteristics of Normal Spinal Degeneration

1. The water content of the disc nucleus decreases
2. Fibers of the annulus, a fibrous disc capsule, begin to wear out, just as the thread on tires wears down.
3. The body's ability to lubricate the facet joints lessens. Facet joints begin to suffer from wear and tear.
4. Spinal ligaments become lax, decreasing their support of facet joints. Ligaments cannot be un-stretched. Instead, the surrounding muscles must be strengthened to compensate for the slack.
5. Spinal muscles can lose strength and go into spasm to protect the worn areas of the spine. Unlike ligaments, however muscles have great restorative powers.
6. Osteophytes, or arthritic bone spurs or lipping, begin to form above and below the disc attachments to the vertebrae.
7. Wear and tear on the joints causes various kinds of osteoarthritis or arthritic inflammation of the bony joints.

Degenerative Disease

Degenerative diseases differ from the normal aging process. They can cause severe pain, their chemical metabolism is different, and they often have a genetic source. Chronic micro-trauma to joints through physical activity, musculoskeletal tensions, strains and injuries can initiate and hasten the degenerative process.

Some Degenerative Disease

1. Rheumatoid arthritis is a serious body-wide illness. It affects the joint's lubricating membrane, causing inflammation and often permanent damage to the lining of the joint.
2. Osteoarthritis is the wearing away or abnormal proliferation of cartilage at the margins of the joints. It interferes with the normal movement of the joint and nourishment to the tissues
3. Spinal stenosis is a narrowing of the intervertebral holes where the nerve trunks come through the spinal vertebrae in the spinal cord column. It affects the nerve impulses to the extremities.
4. Osteoporosis occurs in about one third of people over 60, particularly in women. Bones decrease in density, becoming more brittle and injury prone.

Bed Rest:

Still Unadvisable for

LOW BACK PAIN.....

Considerable evidence in the past decade shows that bed rest has not been beneficial to patients suffering from low back pain (LBP). A recent review analyzed all randomized studies up to March 2003, yielding two new trials comparing advice to rest in bed with advice to stay active for patients with LBP. In total, six trials compared bed rest with staying active for the management of LBP.

Results found that advice to rest in bed was clearly less effective than advice to stay active for patients with acute simple LBP. High-quality evidence shows small but consistent differences in favor of staying active for pain and functional status at 3-4 weeks and 12 weeks follow-up, respectively.

Additionally, in patients with acute simple LBP, evidence shows that bed rest will increase length of sick leave in the first 12 weeks, compared to advice to stay active. For patients with sciatica, evidence shows that bed rest has little or no effect on pain and functional status, compared to staying active at 3-4 weeks and 12 weeks.

All in all, it appears that LBP sufferers should not count on bed rest to help decrease their recovery time or stave off pain. If you suffer from LBP, talk to your Doctor of Chiropractic about an appropriate treatment plan to include staying active.