

**Boulder Office**

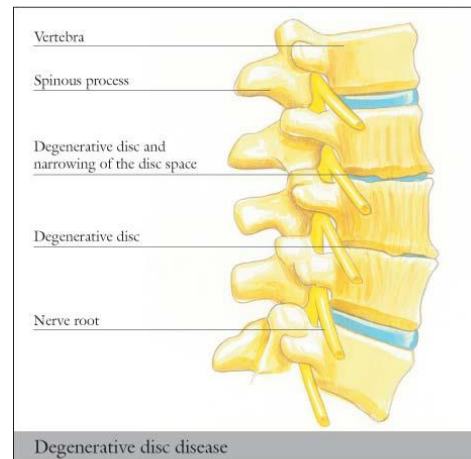
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## Disc Degeneration

- Definition:** Disc degeneration, often misnamed degenerative disc disease, is a condition where there is damage or arthritic changes to the vertebrae and discs of the spine. It is a common condition, affecting almost everyone as they age, but is only symptomatic in some.
- Cause:** Disc degeneration is a normal part of aging, and is due to wear and tear on the spinal structures. Symptoms can be due to pain from the disc itself, bone spurs pressing on nerves, or arthritis in the facet joints. There may be some genetic predisposition to more advanced degeneration.



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- Symptoms:** Most people are asymptomatic or only have mild symptoms. Less commonly, disc degeneration can cause aching or throbbing pain in the neck, low back, or buttock. In cases where the spinal cord or nerves are being impacted, patients can experience pain, burning, numbness, or weakness radiating down the extremities.
- Diagnostics:** The history and physical examination are very important in making the diagnosis, but often times imaging studies are helpful to confirm and further characterize the degree of disc degeneration. Typical imaging studies include x-rays, MRIs, or CT scans.
- Treatment:** The severity of symptoms is often what helps dictate treatment. This can range from physical therapy, medications and, in certain instances, injections or other minimally invasive procedures. In rare cases, surgery may be an option.
- Red Flags:** Seek immediate care if you have progressive weakness in an extremity or lose control of your bladder or bowels.