

Spinal arthritis and disc degeneration are conditions that most of us eventually develop to some degree. Although they are more common as we get older, they are not caused by age. The spinal vertebra are held together by ligaments that form the discs and joints. Damage to these ligaments can lead to degeneration of the discs and arthritis in the joints.

It was once believed that excessive use of the joints and discs, or injury to these structures, was responsible for spinal degeneration. While this is true, research is now showing that reduced motion of these structures also leads to spinal degeneration.

There are 24 spinal vertebra. Each one is connected to the one above and below by two spinal joints. All but the first two are also connected by a spinal disc. There are living cells in both the joints and discs. All living cells require oxygen and nutrients. Circulation of nutrients within the joints and discs requires movement of the spinal bones. If the bones do not move sufficiently, nutrients are not circulated and some of the cells are deprived, essentially starving these cells, leading to gradual cell death. This cell death results in spinal degeneration.

Our increasingly sedentary life style may be responsible for much of the prevalence of spinal degeneration in our society. Even active people, however, can have disc and joint degeneration. Injury to spinal joints can cause fibrosis of the joint. Fibrosis is a state where scar tissue becomes more and more embedded in the joint and disc ligaments. The scar tissue forms as a result of damaged to the ligaments. Scar tissue restricts normal motion. Restricted motion then leads to disc and joint degeneration.

Restricted motion in just a few spinal bones is often not noticed, because the nearby vertebra move more to compensate for the restricted bones. The longer the joints are restricted in motion, the longer the cells are deprived of nutrients, leading to cell death. If the motion can be restored to these restricted joints, nutrients will begin to circulate properly and the cells can begin to heal.

Exercise and stretching can sometimes restore motion to spinal joints if they have very little accumulated fibrosis. The longer the problem has existed, however, the more fibrosis develops and the less exercise will help. These joints need specific work to restore motion. Chiropractic adjustments are designed to restore motion to restricted joints. The impulse of the adjustment breaks down the small scar fibers without damaging the larger ligament fibers. As joint motion is restored, healing begins and pain is reduced.

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