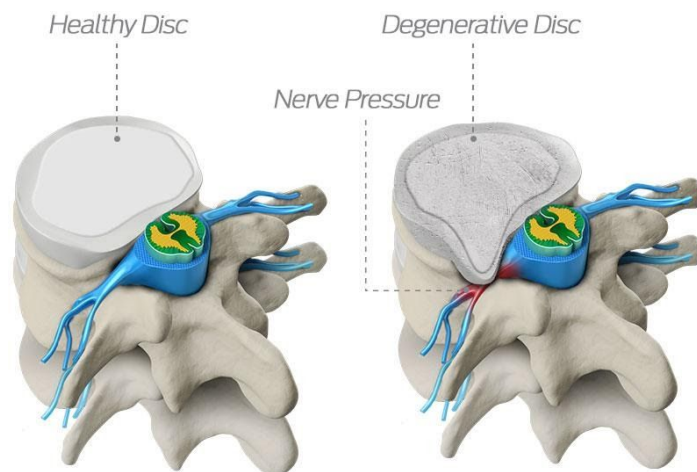


## Degenerative Disc Disease, or "DDD", is not a Disease at All

Your spinal discs act as a cushion to absorb shock between the vertebrae during movement. As a result of aging or injury, sometimes the spinal disc loses its cushioning effect which may result in a loss of disc height. This loss of disc height reduces the distance between the vertebral bodies and may cause irritation or pinching of the nerves. The spinal disc may also bulge or herniate, where the disc material contained within the intervertebral disc is pushed into the spinal canal. This may cause inflammation and pressure on the local nerve.



The loss of disc height and/or bulge of the disc may result in the following symptoms.

- Pain or discomfort in the neck or back
- Tingling or loss of feeling in arms or legs
- Shooting pain or discomfort in one or both legs
- Discomfort that worsens upon standing or activity

### What is degenerative disc disease (DDD)?

DDD stands for Degenerative Disc Disease and is one of the most common causes of neck and back pain. It refers to the breakdown of one or more discs (shock-absorbing soft tissue structure between each vertebra) in the spine and is linked to neck or back pain with or without shooting pain, numbness and weakness in the arms or legs.

### Is degenerative disc disease really a disease?

DDD isn't really a disease but a way to refer to the natural breakdown of spinal discs over time. DDD can lead to a loss of disc height that may cause pain, numbness, or weakness in the back, arms, or legs.

## Can an injury cause DDD?

Yes. Sometimes, an injury causing severe damage to spinal discs can disrupt them causing a disc to bulge, stick out or lose height, regardless of the aging process.

## Who is at risk for getting DDD?

There are several risk factors for getting DDD. The most common one is aging, as DDD is a natural, age-related process. Some other risk factors are: traumatic injury, being overweight, playing contact sports, heavy lifting, and repetitive motions involving the back.

## What are the symptoms of DDD?

The symptoms of DDD may include back pain with or without arm or leg pain as well as arm or leg weakness, tingling or numbness. DDD pain often gets worse with movement like bending or twisting. Only a licensed spine specialist can accurately diagnose a spinal condition, like DDD.

## How is DDD diagnosed?

A DDD diagnosis starts with a standard questionnaire that details the patient's symptoms and where they occur. Then, a spine specialist performs a routine physical exam of the back, arms, hands, legs, and feet while testing for strength, flexibility, range of motion, reflexes, and pain.

The spine specialist may also order some tests such as X-rays, computerized tomography (CT) scan or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to get a visual understanding of the spine and associated abnormalities or areas of concern.

In addition to these tests, the specialist may also order x-rays, computerized tomography (CT) scan or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to get a visual understanding of the spine and associated abnormalities or areas of concern. A CT or MRI shows the soft tissue of the spine, not just the bones like an x-ray, so the spine specialist can identify the location and nature of the problem causing discomfort.

## How is degenerative disc disease treated?

There are many nonsurgical treatments for DDD. Dr. Jankowski first treats your condition with a selection of noninvasive and minimally invasive interventions such as:

- Medication
- Physical therapy
- Massage
- Acupuncture
- Pain injections

Dr. Jankowski won't recommend back surgery for your degenerative disc disease unless you've already tried other treatment methods without success.

## What types of surgical solutions are available to treat DDD?

There are many surgical solutions for treating DDD depending upon a patient's diagnosis, physical condition, surgeon's training, and many other factors. Your surgeon will discuss the options that are available for your situation. One of those options may include:

1. Total Disc Replacement (TDR) in the neck (cervical) or lower back (lumbar) region
2. Anterior Cervical Discectomy Fusion (ACDF) for neck (cervical) conditions, Anterior Lumbar Interbody Fusion (ALIF) or Lateral Lumbar Interbody Fusion (LLIF) for low back (lumbar) conditions.

To find out more about treatment for degenerative disc disease, call Dr. Pawel Jankowski today or book an appointment online.