

# Hope for patients with chronic pain

## Syndrome *Spotlight*

### Degenerative Disc Disease

**Definition:** This condition, sometimes called “DDD” is a weakening of one or more vertebral discs, which normally act as a cushion between the vertebrae. This condition can develop as a natural part of the aging process, but it may also result from injury to the back and can be extremely painful.

**Causes:** Aging...as we age the discs naturally begin to lose flexibility and hydration and are more susceptible to tearing and less able to rebound from traumatic events large and small.

After a traumatic incident, the discs in the spine dehydrate, and lose their ability to act as shock absorbers between the vertebrae. The discs can also become inflamed which may also cause pain. There is minimal blood supply to the discs so they lack the ability to heal or repair themselves.

**Symptoms:** Pain in the area of the injured disc, many times the low back area, it can be sharp, stabbing, throbbing, or tingling. Pain sometimes radiates to the hips, buttocks or thighs. While walking; sporadic tingling or weakness through the knees may also be evident. Sitting, bending, lifting, and twisting can also make DDD pain worse. If pain radiates to the shoulders, arms and hands it's possible DDD is in the cervical spine and can result in chronic neck pain.

**Diagnosis:** Diagnosis begins with a complete physical exam of the body, with special attention paid to the back and lower extremities. Pain that radiates down the legs is a clue to the physician that there maybe something more serious than back ache going on. The physician will check for flexibility, range of motion, and the presence of certain signs that suggest that your nerve roots are being affected by degenerative changes in your back.

This often involves testing the strength of your muscles and your reflexes to make sure that they are still working normally. You will often be asked to fill out a diagram that asks you where your symptoms of pain, numbness, tingling and weakness are occurring. Xrays, MRI's, CT Scans may be ordered to confirm severity of problem which will determine treatment methods.

**Treatment Options:** Often, DDD can be successfully treated without surgery. One or a combination of treatments such as Physical therapy, chiropractic manipulative therapy (CMT), osteopathic manipulation, anti-inflammatory medications like nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, chiropractic treatments, traction, or spinal injections often provide adequate relief of these troubling symptoms. If conservative methods are not able to resolve pain within 2-3 months to allow close to normal movement and activity surgery may be an option.



Damaged Disc

For more information on “DDD” or other common pain conditions & treatments go to [www.greatlakespain.com](http://www.greatlakespain.com) and click the ViewMedica graphic on the homepage.