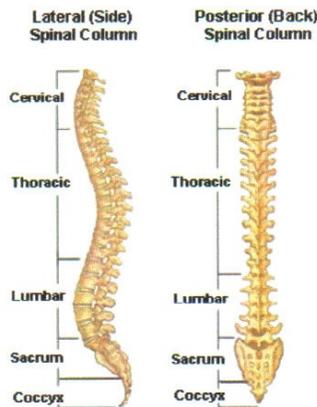


SPONDYLOSIS

What is spondylosis? Spondylosis is a degenerative disorder of the spine that may cause loss of normal spinal structure and function. It is a spinal osteoarthritis which can affect the cervical, thoracic and/or lumbar spine. The location and rate of degeneration is individual and can affect the intervertebral discs and facet joints.



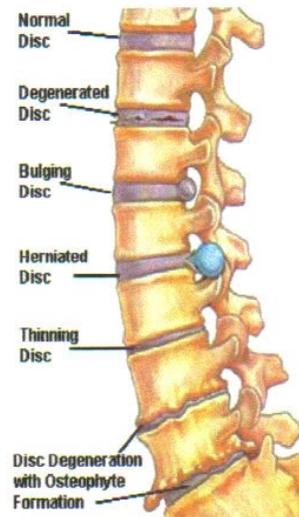
What causes spondylosis?

The degenerative effects from aging are the primary cause of Spondylosis. Degenerative changes or an injury to the joints of the spine may weaken the structure of the discs between the vertebrae. Also, the water content of the discs decreases with age affecting its ability to rebound following compression. Therefore, the shock absorbing quality of the disc is compromised. These structural or biochemical alterations may decrease disc height and increase the risk for disc herniation.

What are the symptoms of spondylosis? Mild cases of spondylosis cause no symptoms. Common symptoms are stiffness and tenderness in the neck, especially in the morning or after activity such as gardening or painting. Pain can radiate to the arms, shoulders, and/or legs. In more severe cases, nerves can become irritated secondary to pressure on them.

Diagnosing Spondylosis

Radiographs (x-rays) may show loss of vertebral disc height and osteophytes (abnormal bony outgrowth). The CT Scan may be used to reveal the bony changes. An MRI is a sensitive imaging tool capable of revealing disc, ligament, and nerve abnormalities.



Treatment

Conservative treatment can be successful. Many patients find their pain and other symptoms can be effectively treated without surgery. During the acute phase, anti-inflammatory agents, analgesics, and muscle relaxants may be prescribed for short period of time.

Physical therapy can be an effective treatment option. A therapist will teach a patient how to strengthen their back muscles to help support the spine. He or she can also show the patient exercises to increase flexibility, spinal mobility and strength. Modalities such as heat, ice, or electrical stimulation may be used to treat muscle spasm and pain. Two important goals of therapy are to teach the patient how to manage their pain independently and to restore normal functional capacity.

Lifestyle modification may be necessary. This may include occupational changes, weight loss, and smoking cessation.