

Degenerative Disc Disease

Diagnosis Explanation:

Degenerative Disc Disease (DDD) is a condition where the **spinal discs lose hydration and wear down over time**, leading to **pain, stiffness, and reduced flexibility**. It can occur in the **cervical (neck), thoracic (mid-back), or lumbar (lower back) spine** and may cause symptoms such as **chronic back or neck pain, stiffness, radiating pain (sciatica or cervical radiculopathy), and occasional weakness or numbness**. DDD is **age-related** but can be worsened by **poor posture, repetitive stress, heavy lifting, or trauma**.

Specific Work Modifications:

- **If your job requires standing or walking:** Use **supportive footwear**, maintain **good posture**, and take breaks to stretch.
- **If your job involves lifting:** Avoid **heavy lifting**, bending at the waist, and twisting. Use **proper lifting mechanics** and consider wearing a **back brace** if necessary.
- **If your job is desk-based:** Use an **ergonomic chair**, keep **feet flat on the floor**, and take breaks **every 30-60 minutes** to stand and stretch.
- **Avoid:** Prolonged sitting or standing, repetitive bending, and sudden twisting motions.

Specific Activity Modifications:

- **If you run or play sports:** Avoid **high-impact activities** and replace them with **swimming, cycling, or walking on soft surfaces**.
- **If you hike:** Use **trekking poles**, avoid steep inclines, and carry **lightweight gear** to reduce spinal strain.
- **If you do weightlifting:** Avoid **heavy squats, deadlifts, and overhead pressing**; focus on **core stability exercises and controlled resistance training**.
- **Avoid:** High-impact sports, prolonged spinal flexion (bending forward), and activities that worsen symptoms.

Recommended Supplements:

- **Collagen Peptides** - 10g daily for disc and ligament support.
- **Glucosamine & Chondroitin** - 1500mg/1200mg daily for joint and cartilage health.
- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids** - 1000mg daily to reduce inflammation.
- **Vitamin D3 + Calcium** - 1000 IU/500mg daily for bone strength.
- **Magnesium** - 300-400mg daily to support muscle relaxation and prevent cramps.

Recommended Nutrition and Hydration:

- **Eat Anti-Inflammatory Foods** (salmon, leafy greens, turmeric, nuts) to reduce pain and inflammation.
- **Increase Lean Protein** (chicken, fish, tofu, eggs) to support muscle and connective tissue health.
- **Consume Hydrating Foods** (cucumber, watermelon, citrus) to maintain disc hydration.
- **Limit Processed Foods & Sugars** to prevent inflammation.
- **Hydration:** Drink **8-10 cups of water daily** to keep spinal discs hydrated and prevent stiffness.

Home Exercise Prescription (Rehabilitation for Degenerative Disc Disease)

Early Phase (0-2 Weeks, Reducing Pain & Stiffness):

- **Pelvic Tilts** - Lie on back, flatten lower back against the floor, hold **5 seconds**, repeat **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Cat-Cow Stretch** - On hands and knees, arch and round back, repeat **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Chin Tucks (For Cervical DDD)** - Tuck chin straight back, hold **5 seconds**, repeat **10 reps, 3x/day**.
- **Standing Back Extensions (For Lumbar DDD)** - Place hands on lower back, gently lean backward, hold **5 seconds**, repeat **10 reps, 2x/day**.

Strengthening Phase (2-6 Weeks, Improving Core & Spine Support):

- **Bridges** - Lie on back, lift hips while engaging core, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Seated Rows (With Resistance Band)** - Pull resistance band toward chest while keeping back straight, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Bird Dog Exercise** - On hands and knees, extend opposite arm and leg, hold **5 seconds**, repeat **10 reps, 2x/day**.

Advanced Phase (6+ Weeks, Enhancing Stability & Preventing Recurrence):

- **Side Planks (Modified if Needed)** - Hold for **10-20 seconds**, increase gradually.
- **Gentle Yoga (DDD-Friendly Poses)** - Child's pose, spinal twists, and standing forward bends.
- **Stationary Cycling or Swimming** - **15-20 minutes/day** for low-impact strengthening.

Helpful Books:

1. *Treat Your Own Back* - Robin McKenzie (Self-care exercises for lumbar spine health).
2. *The End of Back Pain: Access Your Hidden Core to Heal Your Body* - Dr. Patrick Roth.

Click here for more orthopedic patient information.

Contact a Key West orthopedic clinic or reach out to Dr. Jason Pirozzolo.