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Spinal Degeneration

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We sometimes think of spinal degeneration or osteoarthritis as a disorder dealt with only by the elderly. Spinal degeneration is not a problem that singles out the elderly. It is a progressive disorder caused by years of longstanding malfunction in the spine. It builds over the years in direct relation to how much dysfunction is present and how long it has been there. This dysfunction can be caused by any number of stressors we encounter in our lives. It may be from repetitive stress in the work place, or from a hobby. It can be caused from trauma, like contact sports, a slip and fall or a car accident.

No matter what causes the dysfunction in the spine, the process is the same. One or more of the vertebrae or spinal bones becomes misaligned or restricted in motion. This restriction causes the surrounding and associated structures to become inflamed. There is a sort of "inflammatory soup" that builds up in and around the joint. This inflammatory soup causes irritation to tendons, muscles, ligaments, discs and most importantly the nerves near the joint. When all of these other structures become inflamed, they do not function properly and the whole process is perpetuated. When this process continues for years, our bodies naturally adapt and compensate for this dysfunction. The inflammatory soup then slowly eats away at the bone and ligaments that make up the joint complex. The spinal bones begin to deform, the discs swell, the ligaments, tendons, muscles begin to harden and weaken and the entire spinal column loses its balance, flexibility, stability and strength.

This spinal degeneration is like tooth decay – it happens slowly and silently. By the time someone notices the outward symptoms, the dysfunction has usually been present for years. It is not the age of a person that dictates the degree of spinal degeneration, it is the amount of dysfunction and how long it has been present. There are many people in their thirties who have severe degenerative disc disease and just as many senior citizens who have great spines with little osteoarthritis.

It all comes down to how you care for your spine throughout your life. The best way to prevent spinal degeneration is to maintain proper joint function, which means keeping full range of motion throughout the many joints of the spine. Staying active and stretching is extremely important. It is also important to have your spine evaluated by a chiropractor. Chiropractic care can reduce, halt and may even reverse spinal degeneration, by improving spinal balance and posture and keeping your joints nerves and discs healthy and strong throughout your lifetime.

Of course, prevention of this degeneration is the best approach. Your spine should be evaluated any time you are involved in or suffer some sort of trauma to correct spinal dysfunction. However, regular spinal check ups are just important for those that are symptom free. The stress of daily life is enough to take its toll on our systems. It is correction of restrictions in the spine before they cause symptoms and degeneration that will allow the brain to freely communicate with the rest of the body and promote optimal health. See your chiropractor regularly to maintain spinal function and prevent spinal degeneration.