



**NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S**  
*When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.™*

## **Helping Hand™**

*Health Education for Patients and Families*

# **Sports Medicine: Degenerative Disc Disease**

Degenerative disc disease is the slow breakdown of one or more intervertebral discs. The discs act like cushions and shock absorbers between the bony vertebrae (spine bones). Discs begin to wear and tear and bones rub against one another with age. This may occur at any point along the spine: in the neck, mid-back or lower back.

## **Signs and symptoms**

- pain in the back that may go into the hips and buttock
- pain, numbness or weakness affecting one arm or leg
- pain that gets worse with movement or with sneezing, coughing or laughing
- muscle spasms and tightness of the back muscles

## **Increased risk**

- heavy-loaded sports such as (Olympic weightlifting, football)
- poor warm-up before practice or play
- family history of back pain or disc disorders
- poor lifting techniques
- poor physical conditioning (strength and flexibility)
- any sport where movement causes downward or twisting pressure on the spine
- older age

## **Treatment**

- Medicine
  - Anti-inflammatory medicines, such as ibuprofen (Motrin® or Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®) may be recommended. Take these as directed by your health care provider.
  - Other minor pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®)

- Oral steroids may be used to reduce swelling and muscle spasms.
- Use of cold and heat
  - Cold should be applied for 10 to 15 minutes every 2 to 3 hours for swelling and after any activity that makes symptoms worse. Use ice packs or an ice massage.
  - Heat may be used before performing stretching and strengthening activities prescribed by your health care provider or athletic trainer. Use a heat pack or warm soak. Apply for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Exercises
  - Exercises to improve range of motion, strength and flexibility may be suggested. These can be done at home but often a referral to a physical therapist or athletic trainer may be prescribed by your health care provider.
- Bracing
  - Bracing may be used to help reduce short-term pain.
- Injections
  - Steroid injections may be used to decrease pain if other treatment does not help.
- Surgery
  - Patients with loss of bowel or bladder function, or on-going pain, numbness or weakness may require surgery.

## How to prevent

- Do correct warm-up and stretching before practice or competition.
- Avoid activities that require twisting of the body under uncontrolled conditions
- Sit or lift items properly.
- Maintain proper conditioning, back and hamstring flexibility, strength and endurance, cardiovascular fitness and proper body weight.

## When to call the health care provider

Call your health care provider or the **Sports Medicine team** at **(614) 355-6000** if:

- symptoms get worse after 2 to 4 weeks, even with treatment
- you have loss of bowel or bladder function
- new, unexplained symptoms develop

To schedule an appointment with Sports Medicine, visit [NationwideChildrens.org/SportsMedicineScheduling](https://nationwidechildrens.org/SportsMedicineScheduling) or scan this code with your camera phone.

