

Do you wonder if you have SS or DDD?

October is National Physical Therapy Month and each Sunday in October we will answer the top four most common questions asked of us as seasoned manual (hands on) physical therapists. What is the difference between Spinal Stenosis (SS) or Degenerative Disk Disease (DDD) is the first question we will answer as we celebrate National Physical Therapy Month.

Spinal Stenosis and Degenerative Disk Disease are both one of the many causes of neck and back pain. It is estimated that as many as 75 percent of us will have some form of back or neck pain at some point in our lifetime. The good news is that most of us will recover without the need for surgery and conservative care such as physical therapy usually gets better results than surgery. We find, as physical therapists specializing in manual therapy techniques to manage your pain, the benefits of physical therapy depend upon on how advanced the progression of Spinal Stenosis or Degenerative Disk Disease, the severity of signs and symptoms and the effects on your activities of daily living (ADL) and work duties. Early physical therapy intervention speeds your recovery.

Degenerative Disk Disease (DDD) is a type of osteoarthritis of the spine. DDD is usually the result of the natural aging process and for some, does not always lead to pain. Your spine is made up of 33 vertebrae that are stacked on top of one another. Between each of these vertebrae is a rubbery piece of cartilage called an “intervertebral disk.” Imagine the disk as a tire, with gelatin filling the hole of the tire. The tire is called the “annulus” and the gelatin is called the “nucleus.” When you are young- under 30 years of age, the disk is mostly of gelatin. As we age, and sometimes with injury or excessive wear and tear, we start to lose some of that gelatin, and the volume of the disk decreases, resulting in less space between each set of vertebrae. Sometimes bone spurs form in response to this degeneration of the disk, making the spine stiff. When the rough surfaces of the vertebral joints rub together, pain and inflammation may result. Nerves may become irritated or compressed. You are more likely to develop DDD if you:

- smoke
- are obese
- do heavy physical work
- don't get very much exercise

Spinal Stenosis (SS) is a narrowing within the vertebrae of the spinal column that result in too much pressure on the spinal cord (central stenosis) or nerves (lateral stenosis). The most common causes of spinal stenosis are related to the aging process in the spine:

- DDD is a contributing factor to spinal stenosis. As you now know, DDD or osteoarthritis of the spine is a deterioration of the cartilage between joints. In response to this damage, the body often forms additional bone called “bone spurs” to try and support the area. These bone spurs might cause pressure on the nerves as they exit the spinal canal.
- Normal aging and wear and tear can cause flattening of the disks that provide space between each set of vertebrae. This narrowed space allows less room for the nerve to exit from the spinal cord, and sometimes pieces of disk material cause pressure on the nerves.

A careful diagnosis is important as symptoms of SS and DDD can be similar. We will conduct a thorough examination, including a review of your medical history, and will use screening tools to determine the likelihood of spinal stenosis or degenerative disk as the source of your pain. If there is muscle weakness, severe pain or loss of sensation special diagnostic tests such as X-ray may be needed. In general, a MRI is not needed unless surgical intervention is required to alleviate your symptoms.

Based on the findings of your examination, a personalized treatment plan will be designed to manage your pain, restore function and reach your personal goals for ADL, work or play.

If you are interested in having us help you with your neck or back pain or difficult function then contact us at

(585) 396-1400. You can also email us at Zoe@lakecountrypt.com or Robert@lakecountrypt.com.

For more information about Lake Country Physical Therapy and Sportscare, PC, visit us at www.lakecountrypt.com.