VB SPINE

Patient Guide to

Degenerative Disc Disease

Table *of Contents*

What Is Degenerative Disc Disease? 3

What Are Some of the Possible Risk Factors for Degenerative Disc Disease in the Lower Back (Lumbar Spine)? 4

What Are Some Common Symptoms of Degenerative Disc Disease in the Lumbar Spine? 5

What Are Some Non-Surgical Treatment Options? 5

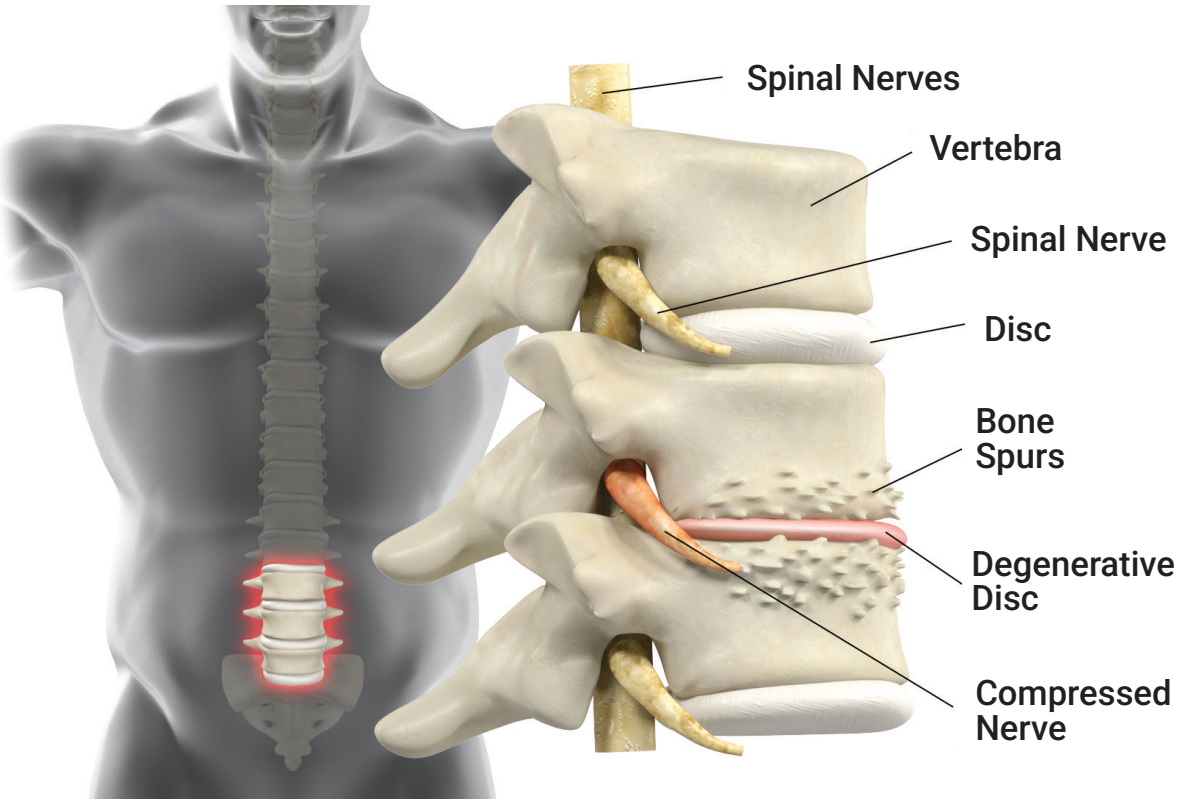
Surgical Treatment Options 6

Glossary 7

What Is Degenerative Disc Disease?

Degenerative disc disease (DDD) occurs in many people as part of the normal aging process, and is often referred to as "arthritis of the back."

As people get older, the shock absorbers (intervertebral discs) located between each spinal bone (vertebra) can lose their elasticity, causing one vertebra to collapse down onto another. This decreases the space between the vertebrae, which may put pressure on (compress) the exiting nerve roots and/or the soft tubular structure that contains the spinal nerves (thecal sac), causing back and/or leg pain.



What Are Some of the Possible Risk Factors for Degenerative Disc Disease in the Lower Back (Lumbar Spine)?

- Normal changes in the intervertebral disc as a result of the natural aging process
- Injury (trauma)
- Repetitive activities such as lifting, bending, and those that involve vibrations
- Smoking, obesity, certain medical conditions, or hereditary factors that may contribute to advanced degeneration

What Are Some Common Symptoms of Degenerative Disc Disease in the Lumbar Spine?

- Aching lower back pain
- Stiffness in the back
- Radiating pain that extends from the back into the buttocks or legs
- Pain that is worse with activity or prolonged sitting or standing

What Are Some Non-Surgical Treatment Options?

Anti-inflammatory and/or pain medications, bracing, or physical therapy may be used to treat symptoms of degenerative disc disease. Occasionally, epidural injections are utilized for pain relief. Surgery may be considered for people whose symptoms do not improve, but usually only if they have associated neurological symptoms or deformity of the spine.

Surgical Treatment Options For

Degenerative Disc Disease

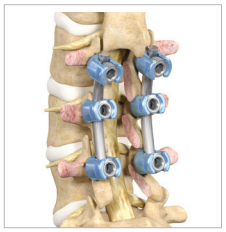
In general, surgical treatment options presented by your surgeon are aimed at relieving pressure on nerve roots in an attempt to address pain.

Spinal Decompression (I.e., Laminectomy, Laminotomy, And/Or Foraminotomy)

Incision: lower back (posterior lumbar)

A spinal decompression involves fully or partially removing the bone and soft tissues that cover and surround the nerves, including **bone spurs** (see Glossary), to enlarge the space for and relieve pressure on (compression of) the nerve roots or **thecal sac** (see Glossary).

Decompression and Posterior Spinal Fusion



Incision: lower back (posterior lumbar)

In addition to a decompression, your surgeon may perform a **spinal fusion** (see Glossary) to stabilize the back (posterior) portion of some of the spinal bones (vertebrae). A fusion procedure usually includes the placement of stabilization devices such as metal screws and rods to help hold the vertebrae together. Your surgeon will also place **natural** or synthetic **bone material** (see Glossary) to assist in the healing process.*

Interbody Fusion Procedures

In addition to a decompression and/or posterior **spinal fusion** (see Glossary), your surgeon may choose to perform a fusion in the space at the front of the spinal column in between the spinal bones (vertebrae) called the **interbody space** (see Glossary). In these procedures, which can be done from a front (anterior), side (lateral), or back (posterior) approach to the spine, and as explained in additional detail below, your surgeon will remove the degenerated disc material and replace it with either a piece of **donor bone** (see Glossary) or an implant made of metal or plastic and filled with **natural bone material** (see Glossary).*

- ### Posterior or Transforaminal Lumbar Interbody Fusion (PLIF or TLIF)

  Incision: lower back (posterior lumbar)

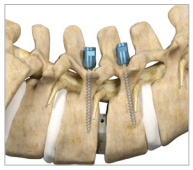
  In a PLIF or TLIF, your surgeon will access the disc space using the same incision he/she used for the decompression and/or posterior **spinal fusion** (see Glossary).

- ### Anterior Lumbar Interbody Fusion (ALIF)

  Incision: lower abdomen (anterior lumbar)

  In an ALIF, your surgeon will make an incision on the front of your abdomen. He/she will then safely move organs and other necessary tissues out of the way in order to reach the spine. Your surgeon may choose to also perform a decompression and posterior spinal fusion (described above) during the same or during a separate procedure.

- ### Lateral Lumbar Interbody Fusion (LLIF)

  Incision: side of abdomen (lateral lumbar)

  In an LLIF, your surgeon will make an incision on the side of your abdomen in order to reach the spine. Your surgeon may choose to also perform a decompression and posterior spinal fusion (described above) during the same or a separate procedure.

* The placement of these implants is intended to assist in a healing process called spinal fusion (see Glossary). If successful, spinal fusion will typically take place in the weeks and months following surgery, and can be assessed by your surgeon on imaging studies (e.g. x-rays) taken during follow up visits.

Glossary

Bone spurs: bony projections that can develop as a result of the natural aging process

Donor bone: bone material that comes from a donor and is referred to as allograft bone. Allograft bone usually comes from bone banks that harvest the bone from cadavers

Foraminotomy: surgical removal of a portion of the foramen, the opening through which the spinal nerves pass on their way from the spinal canal to the arms or legs

Interbody Space: space between two vertebra where the intervertebral disc is located

Intervertebral disc: soft structure found between each of the spinal bones (vertebrae) that acts as a shock absorber

Laminectomy: surgical removal of the entire lamina, a bone at the back of the spine

Laminotomy: surgical removal of a portion of the lamina, a bone at the back of the spine

Natural bone material: bone material that can come either from a patient's own body (autograft) or be donated (see donor bone) from a bone bank after being harvested from a cadaver (allograft)

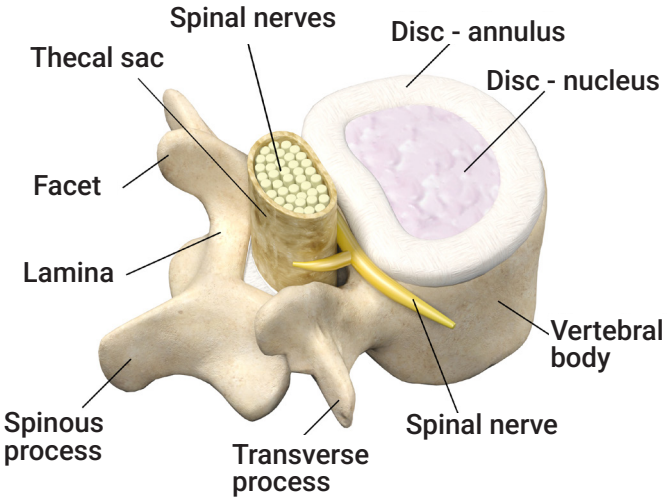
Spinal fusion: permanent connection of two or more vertebrae in the spine, eliminating motion between them. Spinal fusion involves techniques that are designed to mimic the normal healing process of broken bones

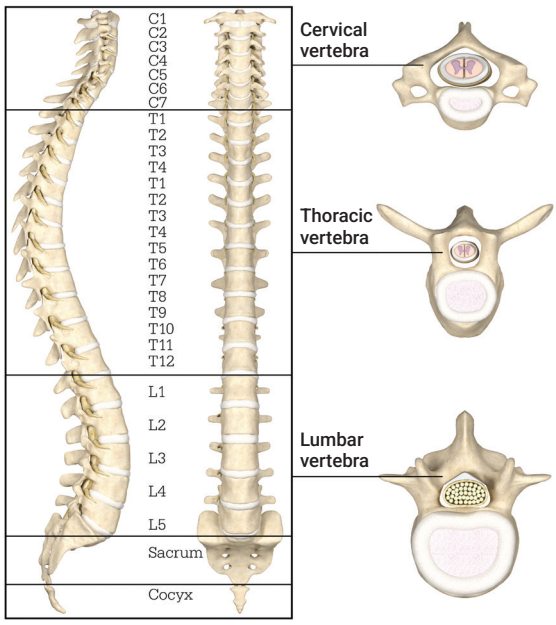
Thecal sac: soft tubular structure that contains the spinal nerves

Transforaminal: through the foramen, or opening through which the spinal nerves pass on their way from the spinal canal to the arms or legs

Vertebra/Vertebral body: spinal bone

Key Spinal Structures To Know





In general, surgical treatment options presented by your surgeon are aimed at relieving pressure on nerve roots in an attempt to address pain.

Some of the images in this brochure depict VB Spine's products. Please speak to your doctor if you have questions about these products or anything else in this brochure.

The information presented is for educational purposes only. VB Spine is not dispensing medical advice. Please speak to your doctor to decide if spinal surgery is right for you. Only your doctor can make the medical judgment regarding which products and treatments are right for your own individual condition. Spinal surgery carries certain risks. Your surgeon will explain all the possible complications of the surgery, as well as any side effects. Each spinal surgery patient will experience a different post-operative activity level, depending on his/her own individual clinical factors. Your doctor will help counsel about how to best maintain your activities in order to recover properly from your surgery. Such activities include not engaging in high-impact activities that could de-stabilize any instrumentation that may have been implanted.

VB Spine or its divisions or other corporate affiliated entities own, use or have applied for the following trademarks or service marks: . All other trademarks are trademarks of their respective owners or holders.

Global ID: SPINE-GSNPS-BROC-2212654
Content ID: GEN-PG-2_Rev-1_23511
Copyright © 2025 VB Spine