

The “Not-So-Joys” of Growing Older

We all experience the feeling of getting older. Our joints hurt, our muscles grow tired, we have less energy, and our body feels like it’s breaking down. It just doesn’t work as well as it used to.

Arthritis is a part of that. As we age, this process becomes a reality in our lives. Arthritis can affect almost every joint in our body, especially the spine that can lead to chronic pain if not properly treated by chiropractic care. So, whether you suffer from arthritis or want to prevent it in your future, keep reading to find out the best ways to keep your body healthy and working.

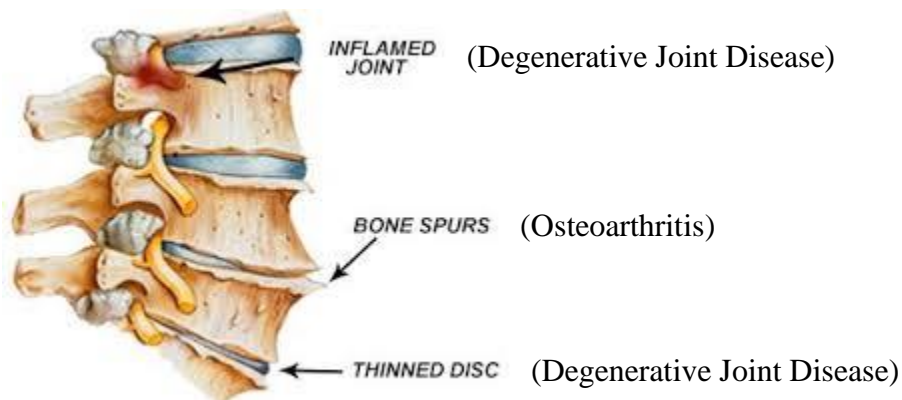
What is Arthritis?

Arthritis is basically a chronic inflammation in the tissue that causes degenerative changes in that tissue. That is, this inflammation causes the tissue in the spine to either break down or enflame. The inflammation and deterioration both serve as ways to keep any damage from happening to your spinal cord (a vital part of your brain’s operating system). Even though inflammation is not, in and of itself, a bad symptom. In fact, inflammation is the first step in healing damaged tissue. But if the inflammation doesn’t go down after the tissue is healed, then it can lead to arthritis. At its core, arthritis occurs as the body’s way to protect the spinal cord.

There are two different types of arthritis. *Osteoarthritis* is arthritis in bone (osteo) that results in development of bone spurs (osteophytes). These bone spurs are jagged pieces of bone that protrude from a joint (where bones meet each other). When the joint moves, these bone spurs can rub against each other, causing pain.

Another form of arthritis is *Degenerative Joint Disease*. This arthritis is in the disk and facet joints in the spine, but it can also be in any other joint in the body. *Degenerative Joint Disease* can either be an inflammation of the tissue in the spine or a deterioration of that tissue in the spine. Either way, this damaged tissue changes the structure of the bones in the spine shifts them from their normal position. This is what causes arthritis pain.

When we get arthritis in the spine, it usually starts off as *Degenerative Joint Disease* and when enough damage is caused, *Osteoarthritis* is the body’s response to the *Degenerative Joint Disease* in order to try to preserve the spinal cord, creating bone spurs as a way of protecting the tissue behind it.



What Causes Arthritis?

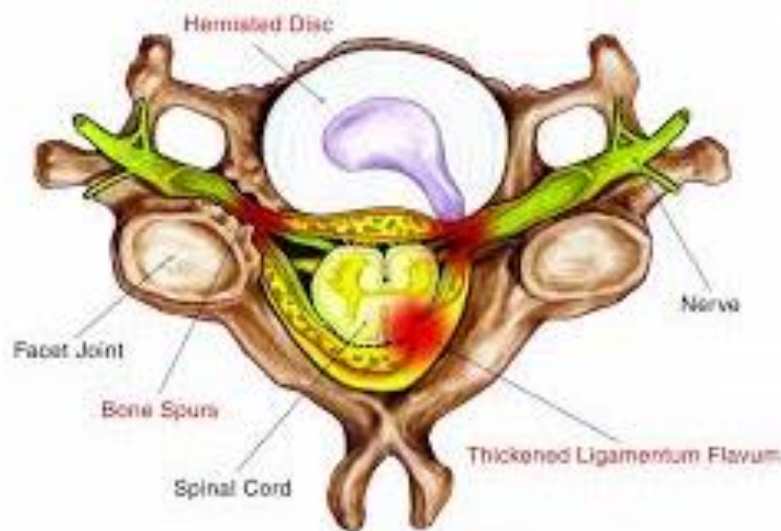
There are three causes to arthritis in the spine: wear and tear, trauma, and subluxation

Wear and tear

Wear and tear arthritis is just overuse due to repetition. This could come from play a single sport most of your life or repetitive manual labor in your career. The disk and facet joints in the spine are just wearing out due to overuse and, arthritis sets in to protect your spinal cord from damage.

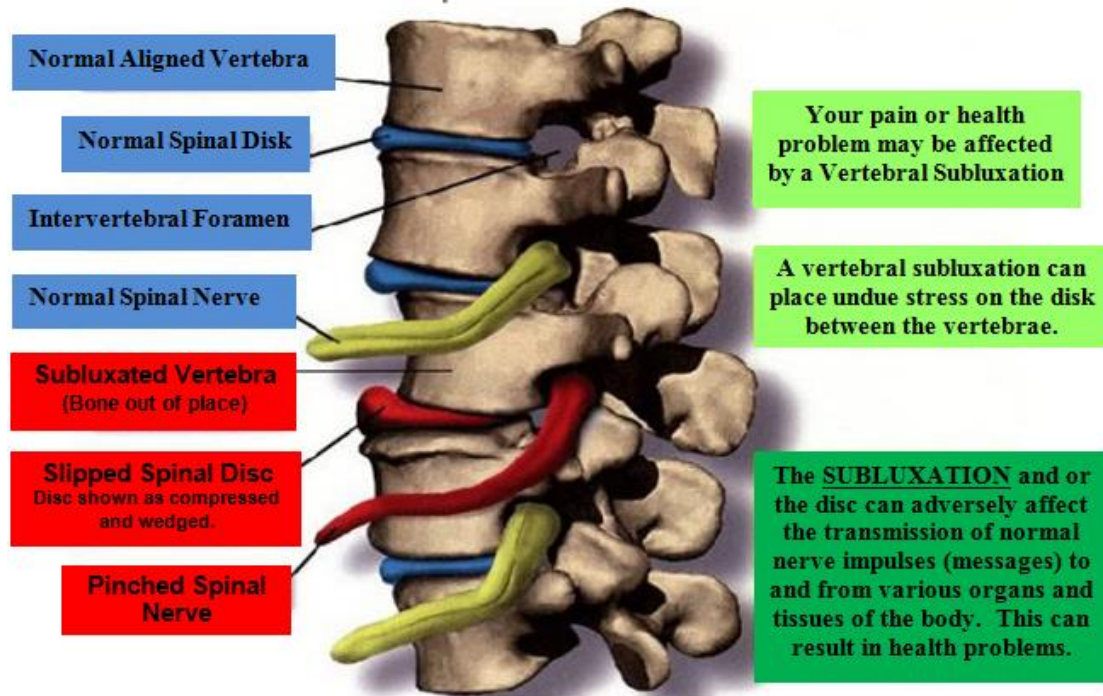
Trauma

Trauma arthritis happens when any sort of trauma (such as an injury) occurs to either the disk or facet joint in the spine. As a result, these joints become damaged and weakened. They can't function normally, and the arthritis process sets in to help protect the spinal cord. In the picture below, you'll see an example of herniated disk which puts pressure on the surrounding nerves, causing pain and disfunction within the spine. The body will respond with both *Degenerative Joint Disease* and *Osteoarthritis* to help protect your spinal cord.



Subluxation

Subluxation is the easiest kind of arthritis to treat. Subluxation is basically a vertebra out of alignment or not moving properly, and as a result, it pinches the surrounding nerves. Since a subluxated vertebrae cannot go through its proper range of motion, the bones cannot receive their proper nutrients from the body and begin to break down. When a vertebrae subluxates, and it's not treated, it can cause both the *Degenerative Joint Disease* first and then the *Osteoarthritis* forms of arthritis. Both types of arthritis set in to try to protect your spinal cord.



What can we do to keep our spines healthy?

Like everything else, prevention and maintenance are the first keys to maintaining your body's health and preventing arthritis. This looks like regular and proper exercise, balanced nutrition, good sleep, and continual visits to your chiropractor. All of these are important aspects to your health that not only will help prevent arthritis but will also create a lifestyle of health for your body to live in and enjoy.

But what if you already have some arthritis? What can you do then? The answer is as simple as it might be frustrating: more prevention and maintenance.

Protecting and maintaining the spine:

- **Regular chiropractic care:** Chiropractic care helps keep the spine moving properly. So, whether you have arthritis or are looking to prevent it, chiropractic care will help keep your spine healthy to lessen the pain and avoid it in the future.
- **Proper lifting:** Lifting properly is the most important thing to do to protect the spine. To lift objects properly, lift with your knees, not your back. That way, the weight is centered in your lower-body (where there's more stability and grounding) rather than your upper body that houses all of your vital organs and structures. If possible, lift with your body straight, not lift kitty-corner to avoid twisting your spine.
- **Proper posture:**
 - Sleep on your side or back, and avoid stomach sleeping.

- Make sure your work station is properly setup.
- Sit straight up in chairs (no slouching) to avoid forward head posture.
- **Be aware:** Be mindful when doing activities that might injure the spine.
- **Core exercise and stretching:** See last month's newsletter ([link here](#))
- **Stop smoking:** Smoking can decrease oxygen to the vertebrae by 50%, weakening and damaging the structure of the spine. Stopping smoking will help your spine get the nutrients it needs to stay strong and pain-free.
- **Low inflammatory diet:** Eat a diet that is high in green vegetable, berries, omega 3, vitamin D3, healthy oils, fiber, and nuts that is also low in red meat, omega 6, trans fat, and refined sugar. If you would like more information or tips on how to eat for the health of your spine, check out this helpful website:
<https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-22607/11-food-rules-for-the-ultimate-anti-inflammatory-diet.html>

If you have any questions about arthritis, your spine, or how to make healthy your lifestyle, call or email Scherping Chiropractic in Maple Grove today, so that you can be prepared to live the life you want to live, now and always.

Welcome back to health!

For more information on the spine, visit this website below:

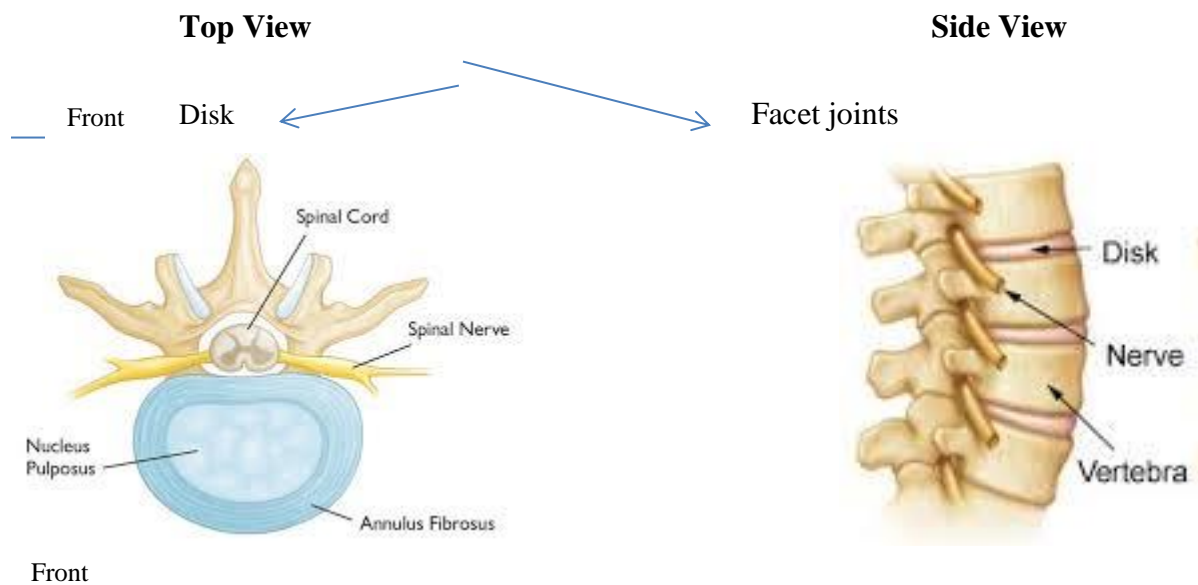
<http://www.spine-health.com/conditions/spine-anatomy/spinal-cord-and-spinal-nerve-roots>

A fun tidbit of information:

In the side view you can see the spine goes vertebra-disk-vertebra-disk. The front part of the vertebra is the disc, it keeps the vertebra apart. The back part of the vertebra are the facet joints, they act like guides when the vertebrae go through their natural range of motion. When the vertebrae come together they form holes so the nerves can exit and go wherever they need to go.

In the top view you can see that the disk is made up an Annulus Fibrosus outer ring that holds the disc together and inside is the Nucleus Pulposus, this is like a superball that pushes the vertebra apart, acting like a cushion.

The purpose of the spine is to house and protect the spinal cord. The spinal cord is part of the brain and nearly all nerve signals travel through the cord.



The disc is made up about 80% water and they have no blood vessels. When the spine goes through its normal range of motion blood is pumped from the vertebra into the disc bring nutrients. Rehydration of the disk happens at night when we are sleeping because the weight of the body is off them, thus allowing water back in. This is why you are taller in the morning.