

Article by Joanne Pineau. Originally posted on my facebook page Inner Journey Yoga Therapy.

Degenerative Disc Disease. Is it really a disease?

No, it is not!

Over the last 5 years or so I've seen many individuals with sciatica and back pain. One diagnosis from doctors that comes up often is the term degenerated disc disease. The word disease can be quite ominous and like a life sentence - can something be done about it, they ask?

If you've been told that you have this "disease" take heart.

Dr. Stuart McGill PhD, is an expert in the field of back pain and states emphatically that there is no such thing as degenerated disc disease - it's NOT a disease. In his book "Back Mechanic. The secrets to a healthy spine your doctor isn't telling you", he states the following:

" In the vast majority of cases degenerative disc disease is a misdiagnosis. Dark shading in the discs visible on an MRI or CT scan is a sign of loss of water content in the spine....labeling this a "degenerative disease" is unnecessarily dramatic and is unhelpful in determining a course of action for the patient....it is likely that it's a flattened disc which is the product of an injury- not aging...if left alone the disc eventually stiffens over time and the pain resolves (this is a natural healing process). "

If you google the term degenerative disc disease this is the definition that comes up:

"Degenerative disc disease is not really a disease but a term used to describe the normal changes in your spinal discs as you age." I would add, not necessarily as we age. Like Dr. Stuart I would prefer to think of it as a result of an injury rather than something we should expect as we age, fate.

Although with time the disc will stiffen and pain subside, I prefer a more active approach - why wait to be pain free? Learning how to move and use your body in a way that increases functionality and toning the muscles that support your spine can eliminate the pain entirely. Not only that, but you'll feel stronger from the inside.

You can learn how to "brace" your body as you perform these every day movements that initially cause the discomfort or pain. ("Brace" - to engage your inner core and stabilize the affected vertebrae as you move.)

As well, there are exercises that can strengthen your inner corset and the muscles that support the spine to provide more stability to the vertebrae so micro-movements that are often the cause of the pain, are less frequent and painful.

Some great strengtheners are the sunbird and plank poses – see photographs below.

As always it's a good idea to learn the proper form (how to do the them properly) from a professional.

