

[IMAGE]

## All in a Night's Work

It is natural to assume that physical strain will cause the most physical damage to our bodies - yet when dealing with back pain, many other social and psychological factors may influence spinal degeneration and pain more than physical forces. A recent study in the journal *Spine* shows that spinal disc degeneration may not be as closely related to heavy lifting and straining of the back as other factors.

The study investigated multiple predictors of disc deterioration, and a possible link between degeneration and low back pain. Twenty- to 50-year-old individuals were examined using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) initially and five years later to determine disc degeneration. People with no degeneration were used for comparison.

Regular heavy lifting was not a reliable predictor of spinal disc degeneration, as one might expect. Factors that were significantly linked to disc degeneration were as follows: night shift work (increased risk by a staggering 23 times); initial disc degeneration at the start of the study (increased risk 13 times); and lack of sports participation. Interestingly, although 41% of the people studied developed disc degeneration over the five-year period, the relation between disc degeneration and low back pain was insignificant.

No other factors were significant predictors of disc degeneration. This study suggests that environmental and psychological factors may influence disc degeneration more than occupational risk factors, such as heavy lifting and regular twisting and bending. This information also suggests that you should avoid night-shift work: It can cause multiple health problems, because it forces the body to fight its natural rhythms. To find out more about degenerated or herniated discs, go to

<http://www.chiroweb.com/tyh/disc.html>.

### *Reference:*

Elfering A, Semmer N, Birkhofer D, et al. Young Investigator Award 2001 Winner: Risk factors for lumbar disc degeneration: A 5-year prospective MRI study in asymptomatic individuals. *Spine* 2002;27(2), pp. 125-134.

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